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“We Are a *Fantasía*: Violence, Belonging, and Potentiality in

Transgender Latina Sexual Economies

by

Andrea Bolivar

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2018
St. Louis, Missouri

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Introduction:
Fantasia, Race, Potentiality & Ambivalence

Jesenia¹ is a 36-year-old, Puerto Rican, transgender woman. She was kicked out of her parents' home when she was 20 years old because of her gender identity, and has been engaging in sex work and living on and off the streets since. She applied to a number of jobs, but was never hired, she suspects, because of her gender, race, and appearance as a trans Latina woman. When she was first homeless in her early twenties, she turned to drugs to numb the pain of the rejection by her family and the constant violences she experienced living on the streets and selling sex as a transgender woman of color. She has been physically and sexually assaulted by countless clients. Then, after she almost died of a heroin overdose, she realized she needed to stop doing drugs if she wanted to live. She also realized that she had found community in the streets, especially amongst other sex working trans Latina women, and this gave her a will to live. After relapsing a few times, she has been sober for the last ten years. As a way to give thanks for her life and comfort others struggling through the throes of addiction, she currently volunteers at an addiction treatment program in Humboldt Park. She is also committed to mothering other trans women of color, an act that exemplifies the importance of queer kinship in people's lives. She tries to encourage them to abstain from drugs and use condoms when engaging in sex work, as she has lost a lot of friends and transfamily to AIDS over the years. Jesenia was always enthusiastic about my research project because of its potential applied implications for making sex working trans Latinas' lives safer.

During my fieldwork I saw Jesenia a few times a week, every week. In addition to walking up and down *Paseo Boricua* together, we often met at McDonald's. This day we were

¹ Jesenia and all other names of sex workers, clients, and family members are pseudonyms

sitting in McDonald's, and as usual, other homeless, sex working, and/or genderqueer people kept interrupting our conversation to say hi to Jesenia. Many gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. She is respected in the community, and these interruptions were common during our meet-ups. Between her visitors, she explained to me why so many trans Latina women engage in paid sexual labor. She said:

We live in a society where there is no law to really protect us and everyone is declining us for work, where it's ok to attack us on the street and to even kill us. Ninety-nine percent of men only want us for their sexual fantasies. Yet they don't want to commit to a serious relationship. *Somos una fantasía* (We a fantasy). So we are smart enough to use you before you use us. But then, that's really dangerous too. We are just out here trying to survive. It's *complicada, mi hija*. People don't understand.

Jesenia's sage words indicate the various levels at which violence against trans Latinas is manifested: from societal attitudes and laws, to employment discrimination, intimate partner abuse, and everyday acts of random physical violence--which can be fatal. In this dissertation, I center sex working transgender Latina women and their experiences in Chicagoland and beyond. I challenge the tendency in Transgender Studies within the U.S. to focus on transgender white subjects (Stryker & Aizura 2013; Richardson & Meyer 2013) by placing trans Latina women at the nexus of critical debates about geography, race, gender, sexuality and class. Therefore, I answer the recent call by C. Riley Snorton (2017), Kai M. Greene (2016), and others (Ellison et al 2017) to pay attention to transgender people of color, and the ways in which they are racialized. However, the responses to this call primarily deal with, and importantly so, transgender non-Latinx black subjects, and moreover, are not ethnographic.

Transgender Latinas are situated in a particularly complex social position, determined not only by systemic transphobia and transmisogyny, but also the wider politics of racism, anti-

immigration policing, and navigating what it means to be Latinx² in the U.S. racial(ist) regime. Undocumented sex working trans Latinas are particularly vulnerable to the deportation industrial complex, as well as a number of other violences. Yet, Jesenia also illuminates that trans Latinas are seeking to survive and maintain a sense of dignity despite such violences. Transmothering and transfamilial connections, is one way in which trans Latina women, like Jesenia, support each other's survival and growth.

Jesenia said something I that regularly heard during my research with sex working trans Latinas in Chicago: "*Somos una fantasía*" or "We are a fantasy." The trans Latina women with whom I worked said this to explain why they are desirable in Chicago's sexual market. It recognizes how they are objectified, hypersexualized, and fetishized by virtue of their gender *and* race, and how they strategically embody, resist, and perform the "fantasy." Their words also allude to much more, however. A focus on the multiple meanings of "fantasia," including the fantastical and the phantasmal, also draws attention to the constant violences the women encounter, how they negotiate violences, and how they—despite such violences---imagine and create queer alternatives to the present and the future.

"Somos una Fantasía": Race, Potentiality and Ambivalence

In this dissertation, I introduce *fantasia* as a racialized queer analytic, which indexes the ways in which transgender Latinas are objectified, racialized, and dehumanized in sexual economies of labor and in U.S. nation more broadly. What I call "sexual economy of labor," builds upon legal scholar Adrienne Davis's (2002) concept of "sexual economy," which locates black sexuality in the economy of the slave trade. Davis links political-economic histories of

² "Latinx" is a term that aims to be inclusive of nonbinary members of the community.

exploitation and contemporary desires, commodifications and appropriations of racialized sexualities and bodies. I make similar connections, and include labor to emphasize the multiple systems of labor—some economic, others affective, and all queer—that intermingle in and around these spaces of sexual exchange. In developing my analytic of *fantasia*, I bring together notions of haunting, potentiality, and ambivalence in order to recognize the past (haunting), future (potentiality), and present (ambivalence) realities of sex working trans Latinas' lives.

Fantasia conveys trans Latinas' sexual otherness on account of their race and gender. I build upon queer theorist Deb Vargas' concept of "*lo sucio*" or the dirty. Vargas extends Jose Muñoz's (1999) concept "*chusmeria*," which refers to excessive behavior that refuses bourgeois comportment and normativity. *Lo sucio* also draws from Rod Ferguson's (2004) argument that sociological discourses of pathology are central to how marginalized people, such as poor women of color or genderqueers, are deemed surplus population. They violate mainstream notions race and nation, and are made to "occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior," in the words of Audre Lorde (1984, 114). *Lo sucio*, however, persists despite neoliberal and homonormative projects that seek to cleanse and eliminate the nasty, filthy, and obscene from queerness, sexuality, and larger society. According to Vargas, *sucias* defy "hetero and homonormative racial projects of citizenship formation, projects that seek to sanitize the world of filth and grime" (718). *Suciedad* (dirtiness), which persists in surplus despite multiple efforts to destroy it, also offers the possibility for queer sustenance and alternative imaginaries of work, intimacy and care. Trans Latina sex workers may indeed be considered *sucias*. Throughout my work, I show how women organize and enact resistant forms of labor, care, kinship, and space-making on the ground, while navigating constant violences that seek to erase them. Yet, the *transgender* Latina subject poses a particular threat to white cisheteronormative and

homonormative projects in comparison to other queer Latina subjects, especially those which are cisgender. Therefore, I argue that sex working trans Latinas are not just *sucias*, but also *fantasias*.

In order to privilege transgender (womanness) over other types of Latina queerness, I find C. Riley Snorton's theorization of blackness and transness in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017) especially helpful for understanding the experiences of sex working transgender Latinas. As Snorton excavates the historical record for a black trans presence, he explains how the condensation of transness into the category of transgender is a racial narrative, and how blackness finds articulation within transness. I similarly am interested in how transgender womanness is informed by *Latinidad*, and vice versa. Transgender Latina women are hypersexual and fantastical on both sides, so to speak. Latinas pose a particular threat to the nation that is intensified in the current political moment.

Thus, my use of *fantasia* conveys trans Latinas' sexual otherness on account of their race and gender. They are imagined as hypersexual because they are Latinas, and fetishized because they are transgender women. I utilize *fantasia* as an analytic, rooted in praxis, and I describe the unique ways in which trans Latinas are racialized and sexualized in their everyday lives.

Fantasia also throws into relief the ephemeral presence of trans Latinx sex workers within the United States and the phantasmal qualities of their lives. They are always at risk of disappearing. As Latinxs they are viewed as permanent foreigners. Those who are undocumented may be deported at any given moment. As transgender individuals, especially women of color, they are at constant risk of being murdered. I argue that trans Latinas are "haunted" (Gordon 1997) by the dehumanizing association with their bodies, and as a result, violence, labor, and blackness. According to sociologist Avery Gordon, ghosts draw attention to histories that have

been erased, denied, or suppressed. “Haunting” describes “how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities.” The ghost, then, “is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” in its full complexity (1997, 8). *Fantasia* draws attention to the phantasmal: the long histories of racialized and gendered violence and exploitation that are written on the body and linger in the present.

Still, *fantasia* also reveals a queer potentiality, as described by José Esteban Muñoz (2010). Muñoz advocates for a politically idealist utopian vision of queer as the futurity of the “not yet here.” My interlocutors have used their bodies to survive and at times thrive, creating an alternative economy based on the racialized and gendered discourses about them. *Fantasia* as potentiality accounts for a trans imagination, going someplace beyond what one has been taught about race and gender--a way of being in the world which requires “radical deviance,” (Cohen 2004). Writing about black communities, queer theorist Cathy Cohen (2004), argues that scholars must highlight the agency of nonconforming “outsiders.” The repetition of deviant acts, Cohen suggests, might transform into conscious acts of resistance that serve as the basis for a mobilized politics of deviance. Together, trans Latina women develop and repeat queer, deviant, and resistant forms of labor, kinship, care, and space-making, which I will describe in detail throughout this dissertation. In this space, trans Latinas often live against the will of the State and at the will of their community.

At the same time, however, *fantasia* is the place at which the past and the future meet, resulting in a profound ambivalence. An ethnographic examination of how trans Latinas are *una fantasia*, engage with *fantasia*, and create *fantasia*--and more importantly the tensions inherent in these processes--reveals a profound ambivalence in their everyday lives. A critical ambivalence

characterizes my interlocutors' subjectivities, their participation in processes of racialization (of themselves and others), relations with kin, and views of sexual economies of labor. It is tempting to idealize the persistence and resistance of hyper-marginalized people, about which there exist so few positive portrayals. It is also enticing to only gesture towards queer utopia. Yet, conceptualizations of queer utopias are often white, and thus sanitized. To be clear, my research reveals that trans Latina women creatively survive and thrive despite a backdrop of incredible violence. Yet laboring in the United States as a queer person of color isn't always neat or pleasurable. It is sometimes violent and ugly, by virtue of the structure of the nation and its economy wherein which poor people of color are disregarded and pitted against one another. For example, sometimes the women perpetuate violence against others, including transphobia and racism, too. I capture this reality in order to reveal the full scope of humanity of trans people of color, which is by nature messy, ambiguous, and contradictory. Moreover, it highlights the political, social, and economic precarity that circumscribes the lives of queer people of color in the United States.

While social scientists (e.g. Merton 1976; Bauman 1991) have long been concerned with understanding how people navigate ambiguity and contradiction, anthropologists have recently begun to more directly consider the value of contradiction and ambivalence (Berliner 2016; Ledeneva 2016) in individuals' lives and in the larger societies in which they live. Kiara Kierans and Kirsten Bell (2017) encourage anthropologists to cultivate ambivalence as a methodological heuristic in order to avoid static interpretations of the world during a particularly polarizing era. I draw from Kierans & Bell (2017) employment of ambivalence as an analytic and Deana Jovanovic's (2016:3) work on ambivalence among people living in a copper processing town in East Serbia. Jovanovic uses ambivalence to understand how her interlocutors dealt with myriad

ambiguities (which she described as “situations”) and contradictions (which she views as “embedded in a wider social arrangement and on an individual level”). Adding to the HAU debate on “Anthropology and the Study of Contradictions” (Berliner et al 2016), Jovanovic (2016, 2) argues that rather than focusing solely on ambivalent propositions or utterances, scholars should pay attention to people's dispositions, or “the ways in which people are orientated to things, people, and objects in regards to their futures, which further shapes people's everyday experiences, subjectivities, and selves.” Dispositions include “statements, propositions, utterances, behaviors, attitudes, affects, emotions, and beliefs.” Jovanovic suggests that examining ambivalent dispositions gets at “encounters with the social, political, and economic conditions on which people are reliant on, and which more than often ‘work against’ them.” Therefore, it has the potential to “repoliticize power relations” and to “embed contradictions in actual contexts, where the simple choice of “either/or” is a very rare instance for people” (Jovanovic 2016, 4).

I similarly situate transgender Latinas’ ambivalent attitudes and actions within the specificities of Chicago's racialized sexual economy of labor, which is circumscribed by local and transnational politics of racism, colorism, transphobia, and capitalism. However, I introduce a gendered and racialized ambivalence, which arises from the unique ways in which sex working transgender Latina women are gendered and racialized in their everyday lives as *fantasias*, how they are distinctively objectified and commodified in sexual economies of labor as *fantasias*, and how they use their association with the fantastical and phantasmal as a place from which to create queer alternatives for survival and growth. Using *fantasia* as an analytic calls attention to the ambivalence of the current moment, which is informed by both past hauntings and future potentialities.

Literature Review

My dissertation engages with three bodies of literature—specifically the anthropology of Latinxs, the anthropology of sex work, and Transgender Studies.

The Anthropology of Latinxs and Racialization in the US

The small but growing group of anthropologists who explore the experiences of Latinxs in the U.S. have examined processes of racialization and exploitation (Aparicio 2006; De Genova 2005; De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2003; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011; Ramos-Zayas 2003, Rosa 2016). Most of these studies have focused on the agricultural industry (Chavez 1992; Gledhill 1998; Kingsolver 2001; Striffler & Moberg 2005) and the Mexico-US border (De Genova & Peutz 2011; Díaz-Barriga 2012; Donnan & Wilson 1999; Magaña 2011; Muelhmann 2013; Plascencia 2009; Rosas 2012) and have sought to locate Latinx experiences of racialization and exploitation within larger political and economic events. At the same time, anthropologists have also drawn attention to Latinxs' resilience (Chavez 1992; Velez-Ibanez 1996) and resistance, often via political organizing (Aparicio 2006; Brooks & Fox 2004; Rosaldo 1994) and the formation of complex transnational/transborder identities (Kearney 1988; Glick Schiller 2003; Stephen 2007; Zavella 2011). Recently, in response to a U.S. political climate that is increasingly anti-immigration and, by extension, anti-Latinx, renewed scholarly interest about the border and the politics of immigration has focused on Latinx bodies and how they are marked by power, race, and violence (De Leon 2015; Diaz-Barriga 2012; Gomberg-Muñoz 2016; Bonilla & Rosa 2017). This work is largely centered on the laboring Latinx body, global political and economic processes that force Latinxs to labor with their bodies, and histories of oppression tied to American racial projects that continuously (re)position the Latinx body as a special threat to the nation.

A parallel line of inquiry into Latinx bodies, migrant or otherwise, has involved studies of criminality or illegality, and has focused heavily on men, such as undocumented male laborers (De Genova 2005; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011), hypermasculine drug dealers (Bourgois 1995), and youth forced to embrace illegality as a space of freedom (Rosas 2012). Within this wider body of work that tends to be about men, works like those by Deborah Boehm (2012), Gina Pérez (2004, 2015) and Pat Zavella (1987, 2012) have illuminated the struggles of laboring Latina women, arguing that gender is an essential lens through which to understand Latinx experiences. While Latina women are often effaced by transnational and local institutions (Pérez 2004), they creatively adapt to structural challenges that burden them with extra social and economic responsibilities (Segura & Zavella 2007).

However, very little ethnographic work has been done on the transgender Latinxs, or those involved in sexual labor. My work examines the lives of sex working transgender Latinas, the unique ways in which they are racialized, and the various types of resistant labor in which they engage. I contribute to Latinx Studies by demonstrating trans ways in which the Latina body, as a *fantasia*--or an exoticized and problematized Other--is critical to the imaginative and fiscal economy of the U.S. nation. I also shed light on new violences committed against Latinxs, as well as new forms of racialization, laboring, and queer resilience.

Feminist Anthropology and the Study of Sex Work

The critical examination of sexual labor has been a principal area of feminist theorizing, especially around the gender, sex, and power (e.g. Agustin 2007; Dworkin 1993; Jeffreys 2008; Kempadoo 1999; MacKinnon 1982; Vance 1984). Feminist anthropology was crucial to complicating understandings of people's experiences in sexual commerce as well as the larger political and economic processes by which they are circumscribed (Allison 1994; Dewey 2011;

Hart 1997; Kulick 1998; Manderson 1992). For example, Holly Wardlow (2006), Yasmina Katsulis (2008), and Patty Kelly (2008) provide ethnographic portraits of women as full persons negotiating the effects of capitalism, globalization and neoliberalism as they sell sexual services. In her ethnographic study of migrants in Mumbai, Shah (2014, 7) contends that “sex work is best understood through the analytics of migration, access to housing and water” and found that women solicit sexual commerce alongside other forms of labor, or “on a continuum of income-generating options for low-income urban migrants.”

Important discoveries about sexual economies and the people that work in and around them have emerged from the study of sex tourism in particular. Scholars of sex tourism have drawn attention to global processes that commoditize and hypersexualize the bodies of racialized individuals in the Global South and the nations they inhabit (Bolles 2008; Cabezas 2009; Kempadoo 1999; Padilla 2007; Thanh-Dam 1990; Williams 2013). Denise Brennan (2004), for instance, describes the extreme inequalities that exist in and around the sex tourist industry in Sosúa, Dominican Republic, but also shows how women actively perform racial difference and authentic love as an attempt to achieve upward mobility.

Susan Dewey (2011), however, points out that such studies on sex work as an upward mobility strategy for women who are politically and economically marginalized have tended to focus on the Global South. Moreover, how racial identities are negotiated in sexual economies of is often restricted to studies of sex tourism and labor merits further ethnographic investigation, especially in the United States. Adding to the small group of works on strip clubs in the US (Chapkis 1997; Egan 2006; Liepe-Levinson 2002) Dewey examines the lives of strip-club dancers in a city still suffering from deindustrialization several decades earlier. While she highlights women’s daily lives and economic struggles, she focuses on the “feminization of

labor” and only touches upon race. In her study of strip clubs in the American South, Katherine Frank (2002), similarly focuses on the feminization of labor but reveals that white men who go to Black strip clubs are “slumming,” or traveling to “foreign, exotic, supposedly inferior cultures” (135). She also found that negotiations of racial and sexual difference between dancers and patrons in mixed-race clubs were quite complicated. Black dancers had to deal with racism and skillfully navigate racial stereotypes in order to make money.

In her ground-breaking study on Brazilian exotic dancers in New York City, Suzana Maia (2012) found that nationalist discourses about Brazilian women’s bodies affected their sense of self, the uses of their bodies, and their decision to exotic dance in the transnational space of New York City. She centers race as she argues that women’s identities as dancers and women were primarily marked by their nationality, which “becomes both a stigmata that defines [their] identities, and a prop for the performances through which this very identity is constituted” (89). I am similarly interested in how transgender Latina sex workers’ bodies are marked by race, class, gender, and sexuality, and how they engage with popular, racialized discourses about Latinas as hypersexual (Chavez 2008), in addition to gendered discourses about transgender people are fantastical. Examining how trans Latina sexual laborers both shape and are shaped by racial and gender ideologies provides a lens through which to understand the racial projects that position Latinx bodies within broader sexual economies of the U.S.. Furthermore, I analyze trans Latina sexual economies of labor as generative transnational spaces, where selves are produced, various types of kinship networks are formed, and spiritual traditions are shared.

Transgender Studies

Transgender Studies as a discipline was recently born to challenge simplistic understandings of transgender, with innovative theories and intellectual approaches to gender, many aimed at critiquing the biomedical world where problematic ideas of transgender emerged (e.g. Bornstein 1994; Butler 2004; Califa 1997; Devor 2006; Halberstam 2006; Martin 1994; Meyerowitz 2006; Noble 2006; Prosser 1998; Stryker 2006). Amid a robust canon on the theoretical implications of transgender, some scholars have called for more work on the material and political economic realities of transgender people's lives (Hines 2007; Hines & Sanger 2010; Irving 2012; Monro 2005; Namaste 2005; Whittle 2005). Scholars have answered this call and shown how multiple types of discrimination intersect to socially, politically and economically marginalize trans people in North America (Broadus 2006; Currah & Spade 2007; Gehi & Arkles 2007; Graham et al 2014; Hirshman 2001; Rowan et al 2014; Rundall & Vecchietti 2010; Namaste 2005; Saffin 2011; Spade 2011; Stanley & Smith 2011; Whittle 2006, 2002; 2000; Whittle et al 2007). For example, political scientist Dan Irving (2008, 2009, 2014) has described how neoliberalism affects the shaping, governing, and disciplining of trans individuals in Canada as subjects who "violate social codes that contributed to the growth, development, and global expansion of the domestic economy" (2014, 9). Legal scholar and activist Dean Spade (2011) describes how his (2011, xii) clients at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project "faced both the conscious bias of transphobia that produces targeted violence as well as numerous administrative catch-22s that render basic life necessities inaccessible" and had "no hope of finding legal employment because of the biases and violences they faced, and therefore turned to a combination of public benefits and criminalized work—often in the sex trade—in order to survive."

Yet, race remains underexamined. Some scholars have critiqued Transgender Studies for being too white (Aizura 2006; Bhanji 2011; Stryker & Aizura 2014; Halberstam 2016; Namaste

2005; Richardson & Meyer 2011; Shapiro 2010; Stallings 2015; Valentine 2007) and eurocentric (Bhanji 2011; Stryker & Aizura 2013; Stryker & Currah 2014; Halberstam 2016; Shakhshari 2013). Aren Aizura (2006, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014) answers such calls. He moves beyond the nation state and the liberal democratic capitalist structure of rights claims in which gender variant subjects must present ‘whiteness’ as a form of cultural capital in exchange for rights in his work in Thailand and beyond.

More direct engagements with how race and transgender bodies in the United States are needed. Kai Greene (2015, 2014) and C. Riley Snorton (2013, 2017) recently argued for critical attention to blackness in Transgender Studies. Ellison et al (2017) propose that the discipline has “issues.” The institutionalization the discipline, they claim, depended on the invisibilization of Black trans folks and the use of the Black subject to a “springboard to move toward other things, presumably white things.” My work enters into these conversations by centering the experiences of trans Latinas, some of whom are black and many whom are undocumented, and introduces understudied ways in which transgender women are racialized in the United States. Moreover, my approach is ethnographic, and thus reveals how people negotiate such processes on the ground, creating, resisting, and engaging in racialized fantasía.

Methodology and Methods

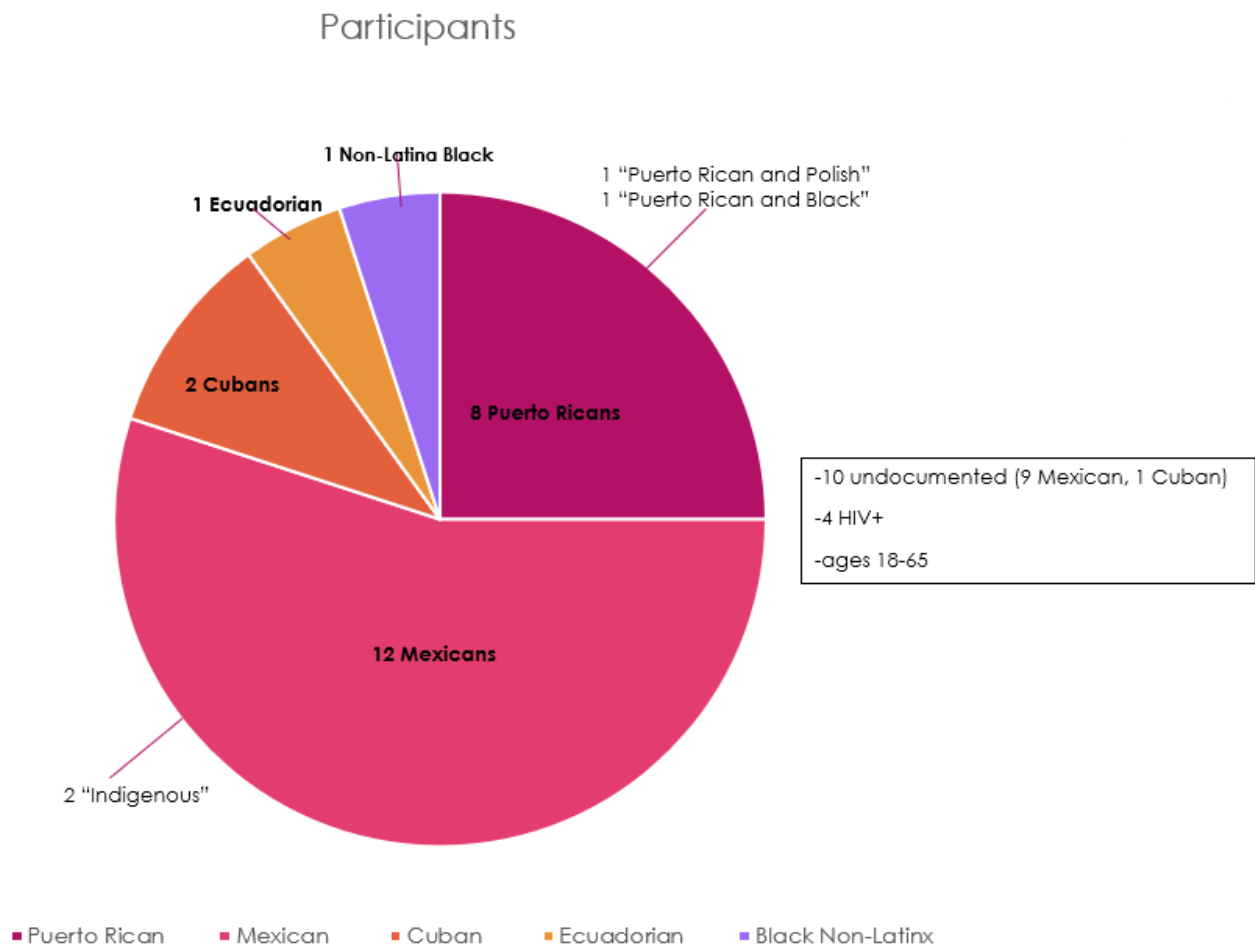
I conducted research continuously between June 2015 and August 2016, with several preliminary visits before this period (about five) and follow-up trips afterwards (about three).

My primary methods included:

Interviews. I engaged in semi-structured in-depth interviews in Spanish, English, and often a mix between the two, with 24 sex working trans women. Reflecting Chicago’s Latinx population on the whole, the majority of twenty four participants were Mexican or Puerto Rican.

Twelve were Mexican, and of the 12, two recognized indigenous heritage. Eight were Puerto Rican and two identified as “black Puerto Ricans.” One woman was Ecuadorian, two were Cuban, and one was non-Latinx black. One person identified primarily as mixed, naming Mexican, Puerto Rican, Native American and white heritage. Their ages ranged from 18 to 65: two were in their 60s, five were in their 40s, seven were in their 30s, eight were in their 20s, two were 18 years old. Four voluntarily disclosed that there were HIV positive, though it is likely that others were as well and did not disclose—I never directly asked about HIV status. Ten women were undocumented, nine of which were Mexican and one was Cuban. Seven were born in the mainland United States, 16 were not.

Figure 1



All of the women engaged in sexual labor that would be considered “prostitution,” accepting money and other valuable goods in exchange for in-person sexual services. Of the 24 women, one was also doing webcam work, and another—one of the youngest participants at the age of 18—was also a pornographic performer. All of the women advertised their services online on websites such as backpage.com and craigslist. Many often turned to the street, especially when business via online solicitation was slow. Six could be considered “high-class” escorts, which means they were able to charge clients higher prices, did not regularly solicit clients on the street, and generally had more control over the conditions of the exchange—though not always, as we will see.

In addition to semi-structured in-depth interviews with 24 sex working trans women, I interviewed various key informants, or people who have intimate knowledge of, insight into, or interaction with the lives of trans Latina sex workers. These key informants include two lawyers who worked, pro-bono, with trans Latinas who do sex work. They provided insight into the legal issues facing my informants, especially those who were undocumented. I also interviewed four youth who were living at a transitional home for homeless LGBTQ youth of color. While they did not participate in sexual labor they lived and worked around trans Latina sexual economies of labor and thus better allowed me to understand the lives of younger Latinx residents, some of who might share similar childhood paths as the sex workers. Two were “gender fluid” and bisexual, one reported that he was “confused about his identity” and bisexual, and the fourth was a cisgender gay male. It is also important to point out, as the nature of ethnographic research changes, informants were, and are still in, regular contact with me and shared a lot about their lives via text messages and facebook messages.

Figure 2 *Central Interlocutors (all based on composites)*

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Documentation Status
Mariana	59	Cuban	U.S. Citizen/Immigrant
Brenda	46	Mexican	Asylee
Jesenia	36	Puerto Rican	Technically U.S. Citizen
Gloria	45	Puerto Rican	Technically U.S. Citizen
Dora	37	Puerto Rican	Technically U.S. Citizen
Brittini	27	Mexican	U.S. Citizen/U.S. Born
Katalina	28	Puerto Rican	Technically U.S. Citizen
Mercury	18	Black, Puerto Rican	Technically U.S. Citizen
Josefina	29	Mexican (Indigenous)	Undocumented
Serena	36	Ecuadorian	Asylum Applicant
Layla	23	Puerto Rican	Technically U.S. Citizen
Veronica	34	Cuban	Undocumented
Cleo	60	Non-Latinx Black	U.S. Citizen/U.S. Born

Participant Observation. Participant observation was a critical part of my understanding of the life worlds and experiences of trans Latina sex workers, as well as gaining their trust. I engaged in participant observation across several sites, including my interlocutors' homes and workplaces, LGBTQ and HIV/AIDS organizations, and streets, bars, and clubs where sexual services are sold. Of all the clubs I frequented, I spent the most time at *La Hueca*³ trans Mexican club that is a key site in Chicago's trans Latina sexual economy of labor. In order to understand the uniqueness of *La Hueca*, I also visited white LGBTQ clubs and gay Latino clubs in Boystown, a predominately white and middle to upper class part of the city. I watched countless "drag" shows.

I regularly attended events in the Latinx community, the queer community, and the queer Latinx community, such as numerous workshops on HIV/AIDS, safe sex, LGBTQ issues and gender identity. I took part in meetings for local trans of color activist groups, oftentimes helping prepare for them. I also participated in protests organized by these activist groups. I accompanied the women to other events that were important to them, such as: a workshop at the

³ Pseudonym

Mexican Consulate on gender diversity, a meeting on LGBTQ immigrants' rights, two Dyke Marches—a grassroots march that celebrates the diversity of Chicago Queer and critiques the mainstream LGBTQ movement. To understand larger issues facing the Latinx community, and thus my interlocutors, I attended town hall meetings on gentrification in both Puerto Rican Chicago and Mexican Chicago. I escorted one person to the emergency room after she fell and injured her arm, and was able to observe how she was treated by medical professionals.

Additionally, I did HIV outreach with Mariana, a key informant described in the next section, in Humboldt Park, the park after which the neighborhood is named. We regularly worked our way through the crowd of gang bangers and other men, most of whom were addicted to drugs, who spent the day-time on the edge of the park trying to sell loose cigarettes and other stolen goods. Because they knew Mariana, her past in “the life” and the current work she does for the community, they respected her, and by extension they respected me. We looked for any “girls” (as she affectionately called them) that might be working in the interior of the park, as it is a popular place to sell sex (though mostly men-who-have-sex-with-men and “gay boys” work in Humboldt Park). When we couldn't find anyone, Mariana would tell me stories of girls she had found there before, and recount memories from her own time living in Humboldt Park when she was homeless and addicted to drugs. People from her past who were unable to escape the tight grip of addiction still lived there and we caught up with them. They always greeted Mariana with warmth and respect, often marveling about how successful she had become. After leaving the park, we sometimes walked down *Paseo Boricua* to admire the murals that recounted Puerto Rican Chicago's history of resilience and resistance.

Access and Key Interlocutors

When I tell people about the community with which I work, the first question they often ask me is how in the world I was able to talk to people. Wrapped into this question are two assumptions. One, that trans Latina sex workers would be impossible to find. And two, if I did somehow locate them, they surely would not talk to me. While there are real challenges to gaining access to trans Latina sexual economies of labor, the disbelief that such a world could be accessed at all precludes the fact that transgender people and sexual economies of labor--- including commercialized sex acts that would unequivocally be considered “prostitution,”--- are all around us. Sex workers, including trans sex workers of color, are people like anyone else who do things like go grocery shopping, hang out in cafes, and even go to church.

At the same time, sex working trans Latinas place a lot on the line by talking to me. They risk making known their illegal and stigmatized occupation, their transgressive gender identity, and for those who are undocumented, the illegality of their presence in the country. All of which could have grave consequences. The project would not have been possible, therefore, without the support of my key interlocutor Mariana. Mariana is a transgender Cuban woman who was 59 years old when we met in 2015. She was working as an HIV tester and counselor in Humboldt Park. In the local trans Latina community, which spans the whole city of Chicago, she is viewed as a *madrina*, or godmother. As a trusted figure in the trans Latina community and a successful outreach worker in Latinx Chicago, she knows many of the trans Latina women who do sex work and can speak to the contours of the trans Latina sexual economy of labor. She herself did sex work in the past. Given all this, I had learned about Mariana, and her feisty spirit, long before I was able to meet her.

Mariana is short, skinny, and light-skinned. Her medium-length, wavy blonde hair was flowing from under her slightly tattered, light blue baseball cap, and her colorful beaded

necklace representing her *santos* (in *Santería*) were peeping out from underneath her blouse. As soon as she walked through the door of *Café Colao* (a small Puerto Rican café that is a staple of Humboldt Park), she was talking a mile a minute, back and forth between English and Cuban Spanish that often took on a Puerto Rican accent. She moved to the United States when she was six years old, and she has spent most of her life in Puerto Rican Chicago. In addition to being astounded by how much information she could relay in such a short amount of time, I was also struck by the warmth that she exuded. It immediately draws you in and makes you feel like family. No doubt, this is one of the reasons why she is such a good AIDS counselor, and also why she is a respected *madrina* amongst transgender Latinas in Chicagoland.

Despite the fact that Mariana was able to communicate all of this to me, when we first met her voice was a raspy whisper that at times would completely fade away. She immediately told me that she had lost her voice a few months ago, and joked, “They will not silence me! *Soy trans y soy Cubana!*” Then she explained that she had just received test results from a doctor who told her everything was fine. She said to me, however, “I just feel like something is wrong, that something is in there.” A few weeks later she found out that she was right--something was wrong. She would be diagnosed with cancer for the third time in her life. I would be able to witness first-hand the strength she possessed that I heard about from others, and from Mariana herself as she described prior periods of her life to me. During my fieldwork, she ended up beating cancer yet again. As I look back and recall that when I first met her she didn’t have a strong voice, I chuckle to myself. She is known for her “big mouth,” and her resistance to being silenced.

But I didn’t yet know any of that when she walked through the door of *Café Colao*. She was very energetic, like she always is. After we started collaborating, we would spend hours

together and I would be shocked by how long she would go without sitting down. During our first meeting, before I got a chance to start asking her questions, she started telling me about the major issues facing Chicago's trans Latina Community, as well as the most pressing needs, in her opinion. She thought I was more like a journalist, and that I would just want one interview to understand the lives of trans Latinas, especially those involved in sexual labor. When I explained the nature of ethnographic fieldwork, and how I would like to do a long-term study she got excited. Always thinking about ways to help her community, she immediately saw the potential in my project. She offered to let me "shadow" her, and promised to introduce me to other members of the trans Latina community who are engaged in sex work, and to vouch for me. Some of the women she introduced me to became central figures this ethnography. Mariana thought that an ethnographic look at the lives of sex working trans Latina sex would not only combat the stigma surrounding transgender woman of color who do sex work, but could also have important applied implications.

While I didn't enter "the field" with the intention of focusing specifically on trans women, it is incredibly important to me personally to do research that serves local communities, and in my case, Latinx communities, and not just the demands of my academic career. This was one such opportunity. Therefore, my research became focused on trans Latinas' experiences in sexual economies of labor in Chicago. Moreover, as a scholar of Latinx studies, I saw the need for more research on *trans* Latinxs' experiences to expand the discipline and who we think of when we imagine members of the Latinx community.

I also spent a lot of time with another trans Latina woman, Brenda who became a second key interlocutor and dear friend. She is 46 years old, Mexican, and was recently granted asylum (which is extremely rare). Prior to becoming an asylee was undocumented for over 12 years.

During this time she was deported three times and spent many months in immigration detention centers. She is a *Santera* as well, so she did readings for me and introduced me to the world of *Santería* via her incredible altar that almost takes up a whole room of her apartment. We went out to restaurants and I spent time in her home in Little Village. Therefore, I split my time between the North West Side and the South West Side. While Mariana is a *madrina* to the whole trans Latina community in Chicagoland, because she is Caribbean and works in Humboldt Park, she introduced me to slightly more Puerto Ricans than women of other ethnicities, including Mexicans, which comprise the majority of Chicago's Latinx population. Brenda, on the other hand, is Mexican and lives in Mexican Chicago and was therefore able to put me in contact with more Mexican women. Between both key interlocutors, the women who participated in the project were representative of Chicago Latinx community.

Feminist/Queer/Trans/Latinx Ethnographic Approaches

I enacted a “peripatetic” approach (McCune 2014) which allowed me to follow the ever-changing contours of the “field” which was defined by highly transient interlocutors. However, my methodological flexibility and sensitivity was not limited to physical space but also deeply informed how I affectively engaged with interlocutors. While emotional sensitivity and flexibility may not sound methodologically relevant, my perspective draws from feminist and decolonial methodologies that critique dominant understandings of “methods” and the mechanisms of knowledge production (e.g. Craven & Davis 2014; Haraway 1988; Harding 1987; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Being sensitive and flexible to my peoples’ physical and emotional states and needs was a way I ensured that my ethnographic approach was feminist and queer. This manifested in a number of ways. For example, there are certain issues and topics I never asked about, such as HIV status. Nor did I ask about genitals or gender affirmation surgeries, although

some initiated conversations on such topics. My introducing topics about body and genitalia could reinforce the objectification of transgender individuals by researchers and anthropologists in particular (Halberstam 2016). It is important to note, however, that once women became comfortable in the interview, almost all of them spoke about their genitals, as it is important to their gender identity and sex work. And, as mentioned earlier, four women voluntarily shared their HIV status when describing their lives and its difficulties.

Having a feminist, queer, and Latinx ethnographic approach also meant sitting in silence with undocumented women as they cried, and often crying with them, as they alluded to their journeys across the U.S.-Mexico border, but never asking them to elaborate. Because the women involved in the project are all trans and sex working, and some were also undocumented, I always had to have their hyper-vulnerability in mind, especially in relation to my own privileges and anthropology's racist, transphobic, and colonialist history that contributed to harm—both advertently and inadvertently--against participants. This informed the research in two major ways. First, I took extra steps to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. Second, I engaged in community-based participatory research. The latter was not an isolated choice but part of the projects' inception. However, I did have to check in continuously to make sure I was still including and honoring the desires, voices, and needs of the community.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All of the names in this dissertation are pseudonyms. Pseudonyms, however, are not enough to protect my interlocutors' confidentiality and anonymity. While Chicago's trans Latina community is larger than most people assume, it could still be possible to identify someone based on their characteristics and the details of their life besides their name. This is dangerous, because I could be outing my interlocutors are sex workers, trans women, and undocumented.

Therefore, I obscured characteristics, swapped certain traits, and created composites. While composites make some anthropologists uncomfortable, I believe that using them is the only ethically sound option given the people with whom I work (Madison 2012). Other anthropologists working with vulnerable people involved in illegal economies, such as sex workers and drug workers (e.g. Frank 2002) have advocated for the use of composites in ethnographic writing. To be clear, the composites created draw from people's real experiences, and are reflective of the data on the whole. Thus, while a reader may think they recognize someone based on one event or characteristic, the person may not be whom the reader thinks they are.

A Note on Ethical Dilemmas

Doing research with people who regularly “break” the law and are broken by the law poses a constant stream of ethical dilemmas. I cannot be specific about many of the ethical and moral dilemmas that I faced. I will state, however, that there were situations where the interlocutors' lives were endangered. I leveraged my privileges and did everything I could (to the extent that I was personally comfortable with, given my own histories of trauma) to be of assistance to them.

My Positionality

Research that aims to be community-based, participatory, and decolonial forces the researcher to look at their own “positionality,” or the ways in which facets of their identity affect their ability to relate to and understand their informants and shape the project overall. As a Latina, I am committed to doing research that benefits the Latinx community. It is likely that my racial identity allowed my interlocutors to more quickly trust me. The connection to Mariana

saved me a lot of the work of proving that I wanted to do research with and for my Latinx community. I also think that being a first-generation college student was helpful. Many informants expressed pride that I, a young Latina, was getting my PhD and wanted to support me, especially when they learned that I am the first in my family to graduate from college. They too came from families with low formal education attainment. It is also important to note that my own light skin color may have made certain individuals more comfortable expressing the anti-black sentiments that are discussed in chapter 4.

It would be problematic, however, to over-emphasize shared racial and ethnic backgrounds at the risk of essentializing identities and underemphasizing the differences in our gender identities and economic status. As a cisgender woman in a PhD program, I have a number of significant privileges that transgender, under-employed women do not have. I was worried that being cisgender would discourage potential interlocutors from trusting me. However, it may be that my gender worked in my favor. Many of my women expressed distrust of other transwomen (which will be further discussed later). One once said, “I trust a cisgender woman more than I do another transwoman.” And others often said they felt like they could easily relate to cisgender women since “all women are women,” regardless of whether they were designated as such at birth. Some interlocutors may have been even more distrustful of me if I was a trans woman. I think they would be hesitant to confide in me about their involvement in sex work as if I was a trans woman who was not involved in sex work, for fear of comparison or judgement. If I was a trans woman who was involved in sex work, I may be viewed as competition and this too would discourage them from opening up to me.

My identity as a woman with a cisgender male partner also worked in my favor, because it allowed us to talk about “boys”—a popular topic of conversation among my interlocutors. As a

woman of Latin American descent, I have found that asking about and then discussing one's relationship status, is one of the best ways for women to bond in many Latin American and Latinx contexts. In some Latinx circles, much like asking what someone "does" to get to know them, people ask "*si tienes novio*." The importance of male partners is even more salient with in the trans Latina community, as I will discuss more in Chapter 2 and Chapter 7.

After an interview with Moriah, a 27 year old trans Mexican woman,, I was hanging out in her hotel room with her and three other trans Latina women, two of whom I had just met for the first time. It was early in the project, so I was thrilled when they not only invited me to a dinner party that was in a few hours but also invited me to stay and get ready with them in the hotel room beforehand. They contoured (their make-up) liked pros, poured drinks, danced to Spanish techno music, squeezed into slinky dresses, and facetimed with boyfriends. They also very generously did my make-up (I was woefully underdressed). After my mini make-over, I awkwardly sat in the corner of the room. Then, one of the woman asked me if I had a boyfriend. Another woman quickly interjected "*Claro que sí, es linda!*" This reflects popular belief held in some Latinx communities that being in a relationship is an important—if not *the* most important life goal for all women, that male partners validate women, and that only a failed woman—such as an ugly woman—would not have a boyfriend. I confirmed that I did have a *novio*. They all started questioning me about him and our relationship. They were then excited when I answered all their questions. I suddenly felt more included in the space. I had talked to one of the women present, Jackie, a tall, older Mexican with long bleach blonde hair, just once before then. Upon meeting me she flippantly said, "I heard you wanted to study us or something." Notably, she was the only person who expressed such sentiments, to my face at least. I had run into her a few times after that first encounter and she always seemed a little stand-offish. After we bonded

about my boyfriend in the hotel room, however, she gifted me a sparkly blue bracelet to spruce up my pathetic outfit before we headed out to the dinner party. Based on our previous encounters, I never imagined that this would happen. After she gave me the bracelet, she also offered to do an interview. The ethnography that follows would not be possible without her generosity, and the generosity of many others.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I outline the history of Latinx Chicago. I focus on migration, labor, and oppressive state policies and actions. In doing so I demonstrate ways in which sex working trans Latinas' lives and exploitative forces that haunt them, embedding historical violences into their bodies and contemporary experiences. Because violence is so pervasive in the lives of the women, and thus much like an ethnographic backdrop, Chapter 2 focuses solely on violences. I contend that the various forms of violences in their lives are cyclically reinforcing in nature. Meaning, the different types of violences, like the systems they represent, work together and reinforce one another, ultimately creating more violence in the lives of trans Latina sex workers.

The next two chapters demonstrate the racial and gender fetishization encapsulated by *fantasia*, but also draw attention to the phantasmal and the ephemeral qualities of trans Latinas' lives. In Chapter 3, I describe how my the women actively participate in and capitalize on being gendered and racialized subjects, and how they racialize others. I explain how the powerful and fantastical image of the trans Latina intersects with extreme economic exclusion to result in the development of robust sexual economy of labor amongst trans Latina women. And, I reveal how the women also “fantasize” about white male clients.

Chapter 4 takes up the concept of blackness, which I argue haunts Latinidad. I examine the experiences of a trans black Latina woman, and I also depict how nonblack trans Latinas distance themselves from blackness—including black femininity and black masculinity – and taking on an unconscious anti-black stance. Their rejection of blackness, I argue, is intimately related to their aspirations for the feminine.

The follow two chapters turn to the potentiality that exists within *fantasia*, while also drawing attention to hauntings and critical ambivalence. In Chapter 5, I investigate the meanings and uses of money in trans Latinas’ lives. I argue that money earned from sexual labor enables the creation and affirmation of the gendered self, and the development and nourishment of various forms of kinship and mutual care. I analyze the roles of money to create queer kinship with “trans mothers” and maintain familial ties with “biological mothers” --locally and transnationally. Using money as an analytic entry point also reveals a profound ambivalence amongst sex working trans Latinas, both in their views of their participation in sexual labor, and in how their relationship with biological kin may be characterized.

Chapter 6 take us to *La Hueca*, a trans Mexican club that was built by and for transgender Latinas. It is a fantastical site of performance, as the “drag” performances are known within the city and across the nation by certain sectors of the queer community. It is also a key site in Chicago’s trans Latina sexual economy of labor. I argue that focusing on trans Latinas and their space-making and community building draws attention to the centrality of labor in their lives, and thus argue that the trans Latina body is haunted by labor. I describe various types of interconnected labor that trans Latina women perform while in the club: sexual labor, drag labor, kin labor, and spiritual labor. I introduce a third maternal figure, the godmother through *Santería*, and show how transnational exchanges are made between practitioners of *Santería* in the club.

As trans Latina women engage in these various types of labor in the club, they also police gender, sexuality and race. The club, then, is an ambiguous space of potentiality, which is at the same time, a place of inclusion for some and exclusion for others.

In Chapter 7, I further illuminate the ephemeral nature of trans Latinas' existence. I examine the death and afterdeath of Gloria, a famous trans Latina performer and sex worker. After Gloria died, she was prohibited from being laid to rest. Her body was a site of tension between her biological family, her trans family, and the state. She "haunted" her families, in a more literal sense, as the state held her in a state of liminality. Building upon the literature on necropolitics, I argue that being kept in a liminal space, or a phantasmal state, after death is a necropolitical tactic used by the state against transgender Latinas. Her trans family, however, successfully fought for her body to be freed and her life to be honored.

In the conclusion, I argue that in the era of President Donald J. Trump, the lived ambivalence of sex working trans Latina women is the ideal index for the contemporary political moment, our nation's past, and perhaps even the future. Theorizing from the experiences of transgender Latinas reveals that the present moment is one of deep ambivalence. This ambivalence, however, does not result in stagnancy and instead can be a space of potentiality. Upon concluding, I turn to their activist efforts, which arise from an ambiguous space of potentiality, and contend that we should also focalize them, as trans Latinas have persisted and resisted despite decades, even centuries, of grave violence and insecurity.

Chapter 1: History of Latinx Chicago: Migrating, Working, and Exploiting Brown Bodies

Chicago is home to one of the largest Latinx populations in the nation, and while it is more diverse than earlier years, it is still predominantly Mexican (approximately 80%) and Puerto Rican (approximately 10%).⁴ Reflecting the demographic makeup of the Latinx population in the city as a whole, my interlocutors were mostly Puerto Rican (eight women) and Mexican (twelve women). The respective histories of each group are distinct. Yet a few scholars have considered them together (De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2004; Fernández 2012) and furthermore have presented them as two similarly illustrative examples of the United States' colonialist intervention in Latin America and the resultant construction of Latinx America. I too consider the histories of migration from Mexico and Puerto Rico to Chicago both independently and jointly, beginning with migration. I also view each group's intertwined history in Chicago as representative of the United States' continual exploitation of Latin America and brown bodies.

Labor, and the use of Latin American bodies as laborers, is central to both migratory histories, and the development of Latinx Chicago more broadly. Therefore, I center labor in my historical review. Understanding such historical, political, and economic relations is essential for understanding contemporary Latinx experiences in the U.S., which for many are informed by deep social inequality. More importantly, such patterns of inequality, and their historical antecedents, frame the experiences of Latinxs involved in sexual economies of labor in Chicago, which I argue are haunted by labor, otherness, and violence. Their bodies of trans Latinas, the ways in which they are viewed and treated, and in turn, the ways in which trans Latinas use their bodies are deeply informed by histories of migration, labor, and exploitation.

⁴ <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2016/08/chicago.pdf>

Colonialist Roots of Latinx America

As Fernández (2012) points out, as early as the 17th century Europeans in their home countries and in North America used people in both Mexico and Puerto Rico as colonial labor to fuel the procurement of raw materials and the production of goods in order to compete in expanding global markets. Mexicans labored as miners and petroleum workers, and Puerto Ricans worked as needle-workers or agricultural workers in U.S. owned sugar, coffee, and tobacco plantations. Starting in the early 20th century, however, the U.S. began importing workers from Mexico and Puerto Rico in order to fulfill production needs on the mainland. The racialized view of Mexican and Puerto Rican populations as ready supplies of labor was an integral part of garnering support for the political relationships between the U.S. and two territories. Following its victory in the Spanish American War 1898, the United States occupied the island of Puerto Rico—as well as Cuba, Philippines, and Guam—and imposed a new colonial regime. Puerto Rico, like Cuba, was attractive because of its location between the Americas and its potential for the production and exportation of sugar. Additionally, the United States, from the beginning of its involvement in Puerto Rico, viewed the islands' inhabitants as subjects who could be disciplined into docile workers ready to supply the mainland with cheap labor when needed by the market.

In 1917, the Jones Act bestowed Puerto Ricans with “citizenship.” Nationalists, or those in favor of Puerto Rico becoming its own nation, saw the act as a strategic affront to their aspirations for nationhood and independence. Notably, the act was passed the night before World War One commenced, and dictated that Puerto Rican men could be drafted into the U.S. military. While the island was allowed a governor, it was not permitted a representation in congress, and people were not able to vote in the US elections. Nor did the Jones Act did give Puerto Ricans

full protections of the Bill of Rights and other constitutional guarantees (De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003). These stipulations are still currently in place, resulting a partial citizenship for Puerto Rican people. Their status and worth to mainland politicians was recently throw into relief in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria.

In 1846, the United States invaded, in a way that could be considered “illegal,” Mexico and started the Mexican-American war. During the conquest of Mexico, the U.S. created a border that divided Mexico in half. The people living on the “U.S.” side of the border were effectively colonized. The official war ended in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, when approximately 80,000-100,000 Mexican were disenfranchised of their Mexican nationality. While they were technically U.S. citizens, their civil rights were repeatedly violated, they were dispossessed of their land, and were regularly subject to racist violence (De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2003). As the economy of the American southwest developed, the U.S. actively recruited migrant laborers from Mexico to work in the mining, ranching, and railroad construction. Border Control was created 1924 and was selectively enforced based on the demands of the market. This resulted in what has been called a “revolving door policy” where mass deportations are synchronized with large-scale importation of laborers (De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003). This contradiction continues to define the treatment of undocumented Mexicans migrants today.

1920s-1940s: State-Sponsored Mass Labor Importation

Latin Americans began migrating to Chicago in the early 1900s to work in the rail yards (De Genova 2005). By the 1920s, Chicago was home to the largest population of Mexicans in the U.S. outside of the Southwest. From World War II until the 1960s, the Latinx population, in Chicago and around the country, dramatically increased due to state-sanctioned mass labor importation programs designed to specifically recruit Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. The programs

began during WW2 to alleviate the labor shortages in the U.S. caused by the war, the restrictions on European migrations after 1924, and the increasing urbanization of the country. The latter caused scarcities in farm labor in particular. The United States created contracts for temporary laborers from Jamaica, Bahamas, Honduras, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Most positions were in agricultural labor, in states such as Illinois, and the largest number of contracted workers came from Mexico under the Bracero Program in 1942. were supposedly guaranteed free transportation from recruitment centers to workplaces, free housing and water, and discounted meals. They were also guaranteed a minimum number of hours and safe working conditions. In practice, of course, the stipulations of the contract were not upheld by employers. Many bracero laborers endured hazardous and exploitative working conditions. Moreover, the Bracero Program encouraged Mexicans, and not just Mexican men, who were not sponsored by the program to migrate and compete with the braceros workers. Unsponsored workers were even more vulnerable to exploitation, though they were crucial to the running of industries. The official program lasted in 1964, yet it established a well-worn route wherein which Mexicans were specifically sought after by employers (Rúa 2012).

A few years after the Bracero Program was instituted, the Bureau of Employment and Migration, which would later become the Migration Division Department of Labor, was established in Puerto Rico in 1947. It was responsible for administering Operation Bootstrap, a system of incentives and tax breaks to encourage U.S. companies to invest in the island. As the sugar industry fluctuated, the program sought to industrialize and thus “develop” and “modernize” Puerto Rico. It was the model for *maquiladora*, or an export-based economy focused on manufacturing, that would be instated throughout the “developing” world. Important to note is that it made Puerto Rico completely economically dependent on the U.S.. A key

component of Operation Bootstrap was the contracting of islanders to work for private companies on the mainland in cities such as Chicago. The majority were young single women who were placed as domestics (Rúa 2012).

Feminist scholars have shown how the *maquiladora* model in general is highly gendered and, more specifically, sexist against women (e.g. Mendez 2005; Wright 2001). So, too, was Operation Bootstrap (Briggs 2002, Pérez 2004; Toro-Morn et al 2013). The project was conceived amid concerns about Puerto Rico's "overpopulation," and "high fertility rates." Incentivized migration, alongside mass sterilization of women, was a form of population control (Lopez 2008; Pérez 2004). The women were purportedly guaranteed room, board, uniforms, regular days off, and fair pay. Much like the *braceros* from Mexico, they seldom encountered what was promised. Because of maltreatment, women left their employers before the contracted period of one year and founds job independently. Many went on to work in factories (Rúa 2012). Those who left were often assumed to be engaging in prostitution and were thus hunted by "vice squads" (Rúa 2012:22-23). In the Near West Side of the city, seasonal workers, including Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, and women who left Operation Bootstrap were able to cheaply rent rooms. This area was referred to as "skid row," and was a place where prostitution was practiced. While not recognized in conventional historical narratives, the structure of the program, likely lead many women to sell sexual services to survive once on the mainland. Yet, the structure of the program and its racist, sexist, and (neo)colonialist underpinnings also led to an increase in the policing of women and their sexuality more broadly. Stereotypes and anxieties about Puerto Rican women's hypersexuality, which informed the development of the program in the first place, did not disappear once the women reached the mainland, and perhaps intensified. Employees and other white Americans complained that Puerto Rican women were licentious,

overindulgent in drink and loose with men. Popular discourses associated the women with sexual transmitted diseases, even though medical clearance was a requisite for participation in the program (Fernández 2014, Lopez 2008; Rúa 2012). The figure of the hypersexual Latina, which I will discuss in chapter three, gained considerable credence during this time.

1950s: Urban Renewal

Mexican communities had settled in Chicago's south west side, where steels mills, rail yards and meatpacking factories were concentrated. By the 1960s many of the industries had closed or were relocated, yet the Mexican community continued to grow as transnational networks were solidified and the service economy expanded ((De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2003). Puerto Ricans mainly occupied the West Side, but the North West Side, not the South West Side. The North West Side was once the port of entry for European immigrants. However, they left the area once they achieved upward mobility. Unlike Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who arrived when industrial labor markets were failing, European immigrants who migrated in the 1920s had significantly better economic opportunities which would impact the community for generations to come. Latinxs, on the other hand, were left with low-skilled and increasingly lower-paying jobs in the manufacturing and the service industry, or in extralegal economies of labor. Aware of this reality and the potential for coalition building, the U.S. government purposely sent Puerto Ricans to live separate from Mexicans. When Puerto Ricans were settled into the South West Side, where mostly Mexicans lived, it was often in Chicago Housing Authority Projects such as the Jane Addams House where they were somewhat segregated from the rest of the neighborhood (Fernández 2014; Padilla 1987). Despite government efforts to keep the two Spanish-speaking, Latin American groups separate, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans found ways to commune, for example in churches and in nightclubs (De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003;

Padilla 1947; Rúa 2000). Nightclubs and churches continue to be a space where Latinxs of different background create meaningful community, as we will see in chapter six.

By the 1950s the West Side was experiencing increasing physical decay and government abandonment. While it had always housed poor immigrants and thus had been one of the city's most decrepit crowd and sections, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were racialized in a new and more threatening way (De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003). Upwardly mobile European immigrants were motivated to leave by racist fears, and more African Americans moved in. Democratic mayor Richard J. Daley sought to modernize the city. The West Side, and especially the North West Side which was closer to high-grossing commercial districts, were threats to the city's "revitalization." They were deemed slums. Daley expanded public housing in the city, and orchestrated "slum clearances," and massive federal highway construction. The latter allowed the growing suburban population to more quickly access the commercial heart of the city, while bulldozing and displacing those who lived in the path of highways, such as Puerto Ricans and African Americans living on the North West side.

Some have charged that Mayor Daley is responsible for formally segregating the city of Chicago, as he created physical and economic buffers between the white business districts and poor black and brown neighborhoods. For example, in addition to highway construction, income regulations and tenant selection policies excluded black and Latinx folks from various political and financial resources. As Fernández (2014) points out, marginalization forced tenants to turn to informal and illegal economic activities, such as drug-dealing. I would add that sexual labor was likely another important source of income for the city's dispossessed people of color, especially those who were queer.

Latinxs moved further west and south of the city, expanding what would be considered Mexican Chicago and Puerto Rican Chicago (Pilsen, Little Village, and Cicero in the South, and West Town and Humboldt Park in the North). Deindustrialization, unemployment, and racial tensions increased, and in response, so did organized crime and police brutality against Latinxs. A neighbor who lived in Humboldt Park, once confessed to me that in the 1960s, when he was only 13 years old he had a gun. He would carve out a hole in a loaf of bread, place the gun in the middle of the loaf, and bring the loaf to school, pretending it was his lunch. He explained that he did this to protect himself from Polish gangs, who threatened to reclaim the neighborhood they felt was being taken from them by Puerto Ricans. The practice would be known as “Kill-a-Rican Day.” He had to be prepared. And he knew that he could not turn to the police, as they regularly harassed him and his little brother on their way to and from school, just for being Puerto Rican.

1960s-70s: Breaking Point

Puerto Rican migration to Chicago peaked in the 1960s, but simultaneously employment opportunities in the city were quickly vanishing. A quarter of a million jobs disappeared between 1967 and 1982, almost half of them in manufacturing, a sector available to Mexican and Puerto Ricans immigrants (Rúa 2012). Between 1960 and 1980, the Mexican population on the South West Side also skyrocketed (De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003). The growth of the Mexican community alongside the downturn of the economy kindled fears about “illegality,” prompting the Illinois Legislative Investigating Commission report on “The Illegal Mexican Alien Problem” in 1971. Apprehensions by Immigration and Naturalization Service increased exponentially since the release of the report (DeGenova 2005; De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003). Alongside increased unemployment, immigration policing, and discrimination, Latinx neighborhoods experienced high infant mortality rates and deteriorating public schools (Rúa

2012; Padilla 1947; Padilla 1987). In Pilsen, for example, one fourth of housing units were overcrowded (compared to less than ten percent in the city) and the “dropout” rate for the public high school was almost 50% by 1980.

Amid these unjust conditions, people organized. The Chicano movement took off in the South West Side, offering explanations and possible solutions for the widespread suffering that Chicago’s Mexicans were enduring. It also provided people with a sense of pride. Organizations such as *Casa Aztlán* and *El Centro* were founded. As Fernández (2014) points out, these organizations were focused on young men, hoping to save them from gangs. This left a gap in services for women. *Mujeres Latina en Accion* was created in the early 70s to meet the needs of local women. They too were vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, drug addiction, and as Fernández (255) states, prostitution. The organization provided employment training, education, and sexual health services. I would suggest, too, that transgender people were also especially vulnerable during this time in Chicago’s history. Yet historical accounts of their organizing are still needed.

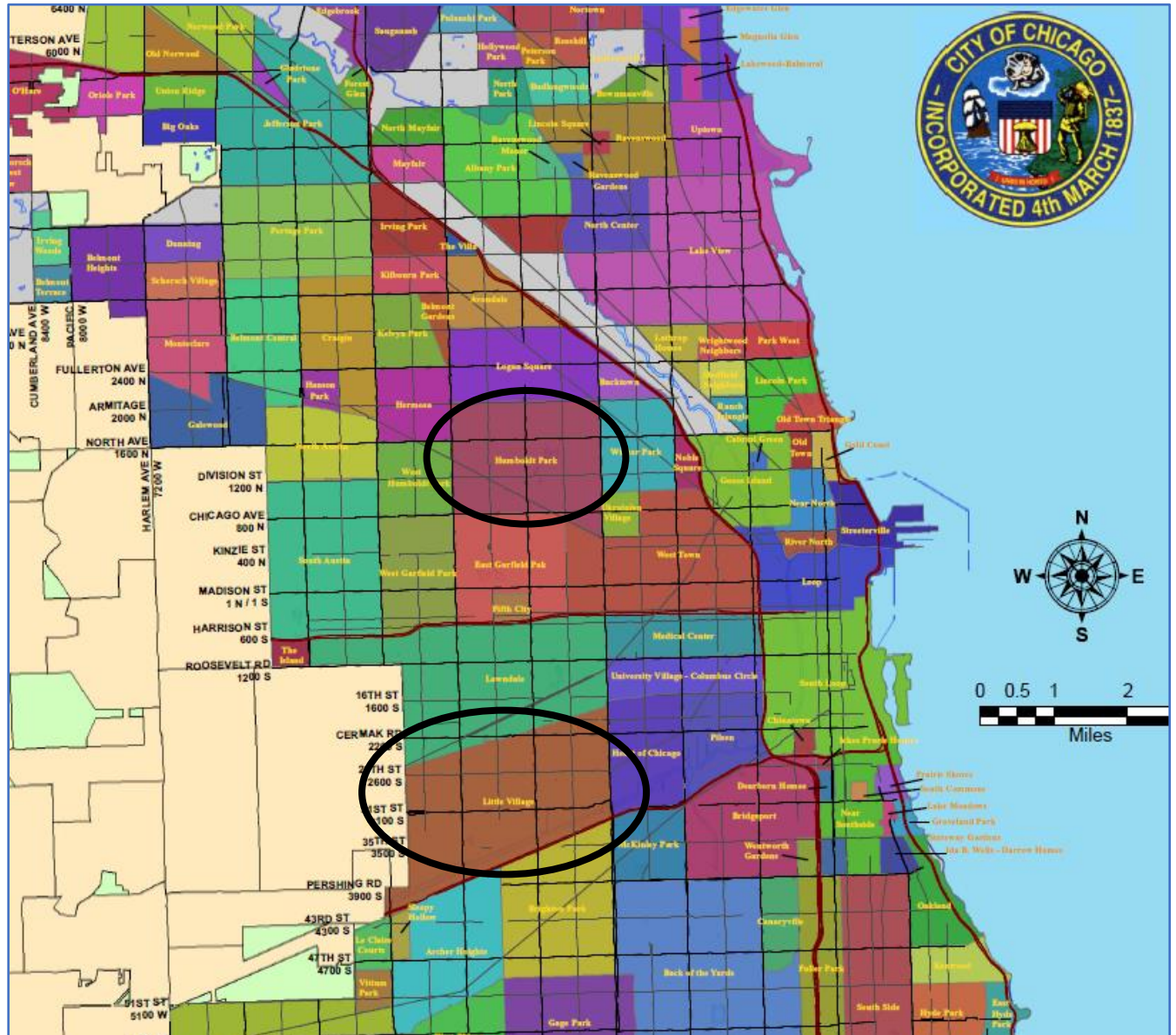
Racial tensions were rising in Puerto Rican Chicago as well. The first Puerto Rican Day Parade on Division Street in Humboldt Park took place in the summer of 1966. As soon as it ended, a white police officer shot and wounded an unarmed 20-year-old Puerto Rican man. The police officer assumed the young Puerto Rican man was in a gang. The surrounding people protested, and police officers unleashed dogs upon the crowd. One person was bitten (Unger 1966). The locals continued to protest for three days, and the event would be called the “Division Street Riots.” The “riots,” of course, were in response to the longer history of racism, police brutality, and economic and political marginalization. Two years after the Division Street Riots a local Puerto Rican gang, borrowing from the Black Panthers, restructured into the Young Lords. Their broader goals included self-determination of Puerto Rico, and locally controlled

development and empowerment of Chicago's Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The created day care programs, demanded safe, affordable housing, and disputed the urban renewal efforts that negatively affected Puerto Ricans. As an attempt to quell dissent, the city took money from the government's War on Poverty Program and contributed it to community-based programs, such as the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, which still exists today. The government thought that such small community initiatives would be apolitical, but they were mistaken. The Puerto Rican Cultural Center, for example, was always vocally supportive of the release of Oscar Lopez, an activist in favor of Puerto Rican independence who was detained as a "terrorist" for 35 years until President Barack Obama commuted his sentence before leaving office.

The Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) aimed to meet the many needs of Puerto Ricans in the neighborhoods that composed Puerto Rican Chicago at the time: Humboldt Park, Logan Square and Hermosa Park. Currently, the PRCC works primarily in Humboldt Park as Puerto Ricans who used to live in the other neighborhoods were displaced by gentrification. Yet, Latinxs from all around the city visit the organization because of its reputation of offering a wide range of culturally competent services. Such services include: "HIV and STD education and prevention program, a bilingual-bicultural daycare, an award-winning alternative high school, a young women's literacy program, a community library and information center, an obesity prevention program as well as sponsoring three major annual events." In short, while Latinxs experienced significant turmoil in the 60s and 70s, they also organized in ways that continue to positively

impact the Latinx community.

Figure 3



1980s: The War on Drugs and the AIDS Epidemic

Urban renewal efforts since 1950s concentrated the Latinx population into four main areas that remain the pillars of Latinx Chicago: Lower West Side (Pilsen: 18th Street), South Lawndale (Little Village: 26th Street), West Town and Humboldt Park (Division Street or *Paseo Boricua*). The first two compose Mexican Chicago and the last two Puerto Rican Chicago. Notably, between the 1970s and 1980s, the Mexican population in Puerto Rican Chicago nearly

quadrupled 12,000 to 47,000. Poor and non-formally educated Latinxs, however, were economically suffering. Reflecting the larger trend across the nation, factories all around Chicago were closing. Semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, the only source of employment that many depended on, vanished. Moreover, after the initiation of the War on Drugs by Richard Nixon, government polices became even more punitive and incarceration rates—disproportionately affecting people of color—skyrocketed. Countless youth of color were arrested for petty crimes, and harsher penalties were dealt for drug involvement than ever before. The FBI capitalized on this racist energy and infiltrated Humboldt Park because of concerns about “terrorism.” While the FBI investigated the files of different programs-- including the Infant Morality Reduction Initiative and the community health center--they were closed for week, preventing people from getting the health care they needed (Ramos Zayas 2003).

The poor and immigrant Latinx communities were devastated by the AIDS epidemic. Yet the community was not complacent. Vida/SIDA is a branch of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. It was founded in the late 80s to address the disproportionately high rates of AIDS among local Puerto Ricans, especially members of the LGBTQ community and other marginalized individuals. It was started by local Latinx activists who were connected to ACT-UP, a large, powerful, and successful direct-action advocacy group working to improve the lives of people with HIV. They decided on the name “Vida/SIDA”, purposefully juxtaposing “*SIDA*” (Spanish for AIDS) which was associated with death, with “*vida*” which means “life,” as a way to challenge the stigma surrounding the virus and related syndrome. One regular occurrence in particular encouraged the founders to settle on the name of the organization. Because of the widespread lack of knowledge about the mechanics of transmission of HIV and stigma that were common at the time, the bodies of individuals who died because of AIDS were kept in closed

caskets during wakes and funerals. This was traumatic for family members and friends of the deceased because the majority of the Puerto Rican Chicago at the time was Catholic, and seeing the body of the deceased in an open casket is often viewed as a necessary part of the mourning process. Moreover, covering up the body, even in important life and death rituals, reinforces the belief that victims of AIDS were “dirty” and “untouchable” and thus undeserving of the basic human rights. The use of the word “*vida*” sought to decouple HIV and/or AIDS from physical, political, and social death. Today the name continues destigmatize HIV and remind people that there is life after the detection of the virus. Because of antiretroviral therapy, it is no longer a death sentence. Vida/SIDA, one of multiple places where I conducted research, remains a backbone of queer Puerto Rican Chicago, and queer Latinx Chicago more broadly.

1990s & 2000s: Increased Gentrification, Criminalization & Deportation

The national economic prosperity of the 80s did not touch many residents of Latinx Chicago. While there was growth in the middle-income housing, it was at the detriment of poor black and brown folks who faced increasing gentrification. The creation of “safe” middle class neighborhoods required the policing, criminalization, and displacement of poor people of color. And Richard M. Daley, who was mayor from 1989 to 2011, continued the gentrification and urban whitening work of his father in a lot of ways, as his main goal was to turn Chicago—or more accurately its business center—into a “global city.” He increased the city’s debt with grandiose projects such as constructing Millennium Park, and preparing the city for what he hoped would be the next destination of the Olympics. This led to the neglect and exclusion of those who didn’t live in the city’s core nor fit into the global imaginary. Richard M. Daley is known for extreme privatization and regularly selling public assets to private companies. Further, he has been accused of covering up a number of instances of police torture. The majority of alleged

victims, of course, are Latinxs and African-Americans. Thus, he only contributed to the city's racial segregation.

Gina Pérez points out (2004:130) that although the 2000 census data suggest that residential segregation has decreased since the 90s, Latinx housing advocates show that 92% of Latinxs were residentially segregated. Humboldt Park, North Lawndale and South Lawndale were and remain some of the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago with some of the worse health indicators.⁵ Pérez (2004:150, 152) also importantly notes that many “legitimate” forms of state surveillance were enacted in the 90s, such as Chicago’s anti-loitering law. Passed in 1992, the law resulted in more the 42,000 arrests of primarily young black and Latino men. In 1995, the Illinois courts suspended enforcement of the law, although police continue to use it to arrest and harass youth of color. Chicago’s reputation of being one of the most racially segregated cities in the country, with one of the most violent police forces, carried over into the new century.

In 2015, Jesus “Chuy” Garcia ran for mayor. Garcia was born in Mexico, and moved to Pilsen/Little Village in 1965 with his father who was a *bracero*. He was elected to the Chicago City Council in 1986 and became the first Mexican-American member of Illinois State Senate in 1992. He has been a member of the Cook County Board of Commissioner since 2011. He lost the mayoral election in 2015 to Rahm Emanuel, who was mayor since 2011. Though a democrat who vowed to repair the city left to him by Daley, Emanuel has been critiqued by progressives for his corporatist approach. Much like his predecessor Richard M. Daley, Emanuel champions privatization. He privatized public transit, for example. He closed 50 public schools, almost all of which were in predominately black and brown neighborhoods, many on the West and South Side. He refused to release the video in which 17-year-old Laquan McDonald was shot 16 times

⁵ <http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20170323/NEWS03/170329937/the-horrifying-health-stats-on-chicagos-poorest-neighborhoods>

by a Chicago police officer. He did eventually release it, thirteen months after the murder, only when ordered to do so by the court. Likely as an attempt to improve his reputation amongst people of color, he created the “\$100 Community Catalyst Fund” specifically to be invested in the South and West Sides of Chicago. The fund has yet to be invested.

In addition to political and economic exclusion evidenced above, undocumented Latinxs in Chicago must also navigate the city’s confusing sanctuary status amid the expansion of the deportation industrial complex. Largely because of the support of Commissioner Chuy Garcia, the Cook County Board of Commissioner enacted a sanctuary ordinance in the fall of 2011. Two years later, the city of Chicago followed suit and adopted an ordinance that prohibits the cooperation of ICE agents with local authorities, such as the Police Department and the sheriff’s office--which runs the jails. Therefore, individuals who were charged with misdemeanors, such as traffic violations and prostitution, would no longer be sent to immigration detention centers. Notably, however, the Illinois Department of Corrections--which runs the prisons--continued to co-operate with ICE. And my research reveals that some trans Latinas who were picked up by the police when engaging in sex work were still sent to ICE after Chicago became a sanctuary city. In general, sanctuary only offers limited protection to undocumented individuals. For example, it cannot prevent ICE officers from raiding businesses and people’s homes.

The election of Donald J. Trump set the country on a path to significantly increase the number of deportations across the country. Upon taking office in January 2017, he signed an executive order blocking federal funding to sanctuary cities. His administration targeted the city of Chicago in particular. White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer has suggested that Chicago’s gang-related violence is due to its status as a sanctuary city. In fact, ICE raided sanctuary cities with the specific intention of pressuring the cities’ authorities into cooperating with them. As I

will show, the Trump crackdown and violence against immigrants had particularly harmful consequences for transgender Latinas, especially those involved in sexual labor.

At the same time, however, Chicago's trans Latina community has gained increased visibility since the early 2000s, especially in Puerto Rican Chicago, thanks to Vida/SIDA and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. The Puerto Rican People's Parade is organized by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, and of course, takes place on *Paseo Boricua*, the heart of Puerto Rican Chicago. It has been going on for over 25 years, and it always had a beauty queen. About ten years ago, however, Mariana and other trans women who worked and volunteered at PRCC, and Vida/SIDA more specifically, fought for the beauty queen to be a trans woman. Furthermore, they created two positions. The first, the Honorary Cacica Queen, is typically an older trans woman who is recognized for her work and activism in the community, including Humboldt Park, the LGBTQ community, or the larger Latinx community. The second, the Cacica Queen is a younger woman who has begun to contribute to the community. Miss Ketty Teanga was the first Honorary Queen. Recalling the first few parades when a trans woman was on the prized main float, Mariana said, "It was celebration of our strength and our survival, against all the odds. We threw beads and flowers at the people in the audience, and they threw it back. It showed that Puerto Ricans of Humboldt Park accepted trans!"

In 2016, however, there was disagreement about who should be Honorary Cacica Queen. To the dismay of Mariana and other trans Latina women, the Honorary Cacica Queen was Cynthia Lee Fontaine. While Cynthia ended up being charming, intelligent and liked by many when she visited for the parade--she even hosted entertaining and relatable workshops on safe sex for youth at Vida/SIDA--some trans members of the community were not happy with her coronation. Fontaine lives in Puerto Rico, and therefore has not contributed to Chicago nor

Humboldt Park. Moreover she is known for appearing in Ru Paul's drag race (a reality show that searches for "America's next drag superstar") and is not trans. She is a gay man who does drag. Therefore, some members of the local trans Latina community were upset that she was neither trans nor local. There was even more drama with the Junior Cacica Queen. It was difficult to find someone to nominate. Allegations of mistreatment of other trans Latina women came out against the first person they planned to nominate. Then, the person who was finally chosen had health issues that prevented her from being at the parade or attending any of the related events. Vida/SIDA stopped mentioning her altogether.

While the parade has historically been a space to celebrate Chicago's trans Latina women and continues to create visibility for nonnormative Latinxs, more recently local trans Latina women have felt that it has deprioritized local trans women, and especially those with health issues--the most vulnerable. The disagreement about Fountaine also exemplifies tensions within the LGBTQ community, specifically between gay men who do drag and trans Latina women. I will continue to explore this tension in chapter six. More broadly, it evidences how transgender Latinxs continued to be erased from Chicago's Latinx history-making, including its queer history-making.

Historical Conclusions

As I have shown in this section, the creation of Latinx Chicago was heavily dependent on the use of Latinxs as laborers and the shifting state policies that regulated the movement of brown bodies. It is also defined by political, economic, and cultural exclusion, and high rates of policing and criminalization. The trans Latina women that comprise this project are inheritors of this history, and I argue, are still haunted by it. However, their non-normative gender adds an additional layer of marginalization. I will show, for instance, that they are excluded from the

reduced employment opportunities available to cisgender Latinxs. Yet this bestows them with a rich history of extralegal labor, resulting in Chicago's trans Latina sexual economy of labor, where they enact sexual, affective, familial, and spiritual labor. While recent accounts of Chicago's Latinx history, including those with foci on labor, have drawn attention to gender (Fernández 2014, Pérez 2004; Rúa 2012; Toro-Morn et al 2013), transgender individuals and the prevalence of sexual labor in Latinxs lives is underexamined. Similarly, as Ramon Rivera-Servera (2017) denotes, Latinxs are often missing from Chicago's queer history. Moreover, my interlocutors are quick to point out that within queer history, transgender women are most likely to be forgotten. This project makes an ethnographic contribution to this gap by chronicling the lives of Chicago's sex working trans Latina women, which are still informed by political and economic histories that reduce them to dehumanized, laboring, brown bodies.

Chapter 2: Violences: Mutually Reinforcing & Multiplying

Although violence is ever-present in the lives of trans Latinas, and thus this dissertation, this chapter will attend to the types of violences that are peculiar to trans Latinas' experiences. The violences they encounter are mechanisms of critical geographic, historical, racial, gendered, sexual, and classed marginalization and result in material, physical, and emotional harm. By describing the violences trans Latinas regularly face, this chapter continues some of the work of the introduction, in a way, as violence can be viewed as the ethnographic setting of trans Latina sex workers' lives. While scholars of Transgender Studies have documented the ways in which legal, social, and economic systems are harmful to transgender individuals (e.g. Broadus 2006; Currah & Spade 2008; Irving 2008), less attention has been given the specific injustices of being a racialized transgender person, especially a Latinx. The violences women experience are localized in the specific context of Chicago, and are also the result of transnational processes.

Drawing from anthropologists who have theorized that violence exists on a "continuum" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), I argue that violence in trans Latina sexual economies of labor is cyclically reinforcing in nature. Different types of violences, like the systems they represent, work together and reinforce one another, ultimately creating more violence in the lives of trans Latina sex workers. The deportation machine, for instance, may drive a woman into sex work, where she is exposed to a myriad of violence(s). Sex work then increases a woman's likelihood of encountering the deportation industrial complex, which is notoriously cruel to trans women. Widespread dehumanization of transgender women on the societal level encourages sexual violence against women on the individual level. As multiscalar violences serve as the backdrop to their lives, sex working trans Latinas skillfully negotiate and are shaped by them.

The context of extreme violence also acts as a fertile ground for alternative forms of sociality, space-making, kinship, and spirituality, which I will continue to explore in the rest of the dissertation.

While there are many “levels” of violence that circumscribe trans Latinas’ lives, I describe two primary ones: interpersonal and bureaucratic. The first half of the chapter is dedicated to interpersonal violences, which women suffer at the hands of individuals, such as family members, neighbors, employers, clients, lovers, and police officers. The women experience interpersonal violences in four related realms: in their home countries, in and around sexual economies of labor, in romantic relationships, and during interactions with police officers. Of course, these interpersonal violences are the result of systemic transphobia, racism, and classism, and the ways in which the three come together. The second half the chapter centers arounds bureaucratic violence, which manifests in Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the many institutions involved in the creation of legal identification. Both levels of violence---interpersonal and bureaucratic---interact, overlap, and feed each other to create more violence against trans Latina women.

Part 1: Interpersonal Violences

The sex working trans Latina women with whom I spent time were constantly victimized by interpersonal violence at the hands of other individuals. Strangers, acquaintances, and even loved ones regularly committed emotional, physical, and sexual violence against them. Thus, in order to understand their lives more broadly it is imperative to ethnographically examine their experiences with interpersonal violence.

Violence in Countries of Origin and Reasons for Immigrating

For the trans women who were immigrants, violence was a regular part of their lives before they immigrated to the United States, and was a main reason for leaving their home countries. Many trans immigrants, like the majority of cisgender Latin Americans who immigrate to the US, do so to flee economic and political violence, or to pursue promised offered by the myth of the American dream. However, unlike cisgender immigrants, many trans people also flee violence and persecution related to their gender presentation (see Carrillo 2018 for a study of gay men fleeing sexual persecution). The women were motivated to leave their home country by intertwining gendered, economic, and familial pressures.

Unfortunately, as 27 year old Moriah's experiences in Mexico reveal, gender non-conforming based violence often begins at a young age. As I began interviewing Moriah in a hotel room, she exhibited her characteristic bubbly energy, but then became tense when she began talking about her childhood in Mexico:

In high school I was, um, no in junior high, um, I stopped junior high because I had so many incidents and, uh, there was one time when I, uh, really remember like it was shocking me the most. I tried to, ya know, blend with the group of my school and I was like, "okay you know what, I wanna be in the group with you all guys, so I wanna, ya know, I'll do whatever it takes to be in the group." So, they're like "ok."

So my school was very close to the, um, the cemetery and, ya know, Mexican cemeteries are kinda like really bad and not taken care of and whatever so they were like "ok well we're gonna, uh, if you wanna come and be a part of our group or whatever you have to come with us through through through the cemetery and whatever."

So, uh, they, they, ya know, start taking my clothes off and, ya know, start doing things and like, ya know, I was screaming and it's like kinda like just to tell them, ya know, to not do anything. So I guess somebody heard my screams and whatever and they put me in the street and whatever all naked and, um, and then, uh, and then some old guy came around and said "hey leave him alone, leave him alone!" whatever, so at that point of my life I was just like "ok this is enough. I'm not gonna be, ya know, I'm not going back to school cuz like, this is, this is, now and maybe it could be something else later where I could be in more trouble something, so.

Moriah's decision to leave the formal education system because of harassment and assault is sadly representative rather than rare. Her lack of a formal education only further

marginalizes her in the capitalist economy. In order to support her family as the first born, she spent the majority of her youth begging for money at a resort in Mexico that was patronized by foreigners. She was still living as a boy, and she admitted that she secretly hoped to meet a man that would bring her to the U.S. where she imagined she could safely transition and “be herself.” When she was 18 years old she met an older man from the U.S. who was staying at the resort. He courted her, eventually offering to buy things for her family, which was very poor, if she had sex with him. She agreed, and they had sex for the duration of his trip, and his next two vacations in Mexico. During his third trip, he offered to bring Moriah back with him to the United States, where he claimed he could find her work. Moriah was excited about the opportunity to support her family and begin transitioning. She accepted, went to the U.S., lived with him, and overstayed her tourist visa.

After a few months of financially supporting her, the older man broke up with her because he did not support her desire to transition. He wanted to keep having sex with her as a boy. Moriah became homeless and began doing sex work. She developed relationships with a number of men who supported her in different ways, and was able to save up for the various plastic surgeries that now enable her to model and “pass.” As a “higher class” escort, she continues to use her body, which was violated at such a young age, to take care of herself, her biological family in Mexico, and her trans family in the US. Yet her entry into the US, and into womanhood, was facilitated by global north/south sex tourism, a transnational industry that has been described by scholars as inherently exploitative and violent for individual sex workers and the countries that they represent (e.g. Kempadoo 2003).

Serena’s case provides another example of the ways in which gendered harassment fuels trans women’s desires to immigrate. She is 43 years old and grew up in a small rural town in

Ecuador where neighbors constantly made fun of her feminine attributes. When she started dressing as a woman at the age of 17 they physically threatened her. She moved to a near-by town yet her new neighbors did the same. She moved a third time and was physically and sexually assaulted by strangers on the street. One might think that given her experiences, she would apply for asylum. But alas, asylum is notoriously difficult to attain (less than one-third of applications were approved), and the Trump regime would make asylum would increasingly restrictive. Serena took her fate into her own hands and left for the U.S. via Mexico without the required legal authorization. She was one of the few who was luckily enough to survive that extreme dangerous journey across the border.⁶

With very few employment options as an undocumented trans women, she began doing sex work. She says, reflecting upon her life in the U.S. and the gendered violence she escaped in Ecuador:

I'm very glad, I'm very blessed. I came to the U.S. and I made my dream. Now I can be a transgender. I live a nice life in the US. I have my nice, safe apartment.

But, even though I left and made my dream come true, that dream came with HIV. Because I got infected in the US. Because I was doing sex work. And that is terrible. You know, and people they don't understand. People they judge. They don't know what happens inside.

Her provocative words recognize that sex workers, especially trans sex workers, are at greater risk of contracting HIV because of the systemic exclusive from the formal employment sector, the lack of trans-appropriate sexual health services, and the increased vulnerability they experience during encounters with clients. Yet her words also highlight her agency and self-

⁶ For a detailed description of the gruesome ways in which people die when attempting to cross the borders see De León (2015). While most accounts of undocumented migration are about cisgender man, more and more cisgender women are crossing the border. It is likely that the number of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals crossing the border is also grossly underestimated. Transgender women in particular are at high risk of being physically and sexually assaulted at various points during the journey north. Perpetrators who seek to exploit their particularly vulnerable status include other migrants, immigration officers, and locals on both sides of the border.

determination in leaving her home country, and “making” her dream come true, while also revealing the oppressive reality of the unattainable “American dream,” (Chavez 2008; Plascencia 2012) one that is particularly harsh for transgender Latina women, many of whom turn to sex work because of the dearth of other income-generating opportunities.

What is evidenced by Moriah and Serena’s experiences is that their respective decisions to immigrate to the U.S. were heavily influenced by transphobic gender-based violence in their natal countries. Furthermore, the use of their bodies for sex work was an important part of their immigration. Moriah’s body facilitated her entry into the U.S., while both Moriah and Serena used their bodies to survive and even thrive once in the U.S. Yet, the involvement in sexual labor exposed them to other violences, such as the violence of HIV in Serena’s case. Lastly, their experiences demonstrate that sexual economies of labor in the US are connected to transnational economies of violence that extend across the US border and into Latin America.

Violences Related to Sexual Labor

As Serena’s contraction of HIV when engaging in sexual labor suggests, sex work is a key realm where women constantly encounter various types of violences. Three-fourths of women report that clients physically assaulted them. Dora’s experiences, however, demonstrate that she did not only experience direct physical violence from clients but also a cascade of violences involving clients and others parties because of her participation in sex work.

Dora

Dora’s experiences with violence, and more specifically what could be considered psychological terrorism, is perhaps one of the most striking examples of violence from my time in Chicago. I asked Dora to meet me on *Paseo Boricua* because I was worried about her. Well,

everyone was worried about her. Of course, I got to the café we planned to meet at earlier than she did (there is “people of color time”, “queer people of color time”, and then there is “trans Latina time”), and watched her get off the 70 bus. For some, it may be hard to see her as a victim. She is tall--probably about 5’9—thick, covered in tattoos, and tough. Thus, she is sometimes read as masculine. She had a reputation for having an explosive temper and letting her “mouth” get the best of her. She was fired from her job at an LGBTQ organization after she “told off” her cisgender co-worker, who, as Dora explained, asked her not to use the woman’s bathroom. Yet, when I watched her walk down the stairs of the bus and on to the street, she did not seem like the tough Dora we all came to know. She was constantly and nervously looking over her shoulder. We greeted each other with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, in typical Latinx fashion. I was somewhat surprised, however, when I felt her slightly shaky hand search for mine, take it, tightly squeeze it, and hold on to it for a few seconds. We entered the small café, and sat in the corner, facing the door, per her request. I bought her a coffee. And asked her what was going on. She explained.

Her primary care physician mailed her a letter that mentioned her HIV status. She is HIV positive, which she has known for about seven years. She never received the letter. She surmises that the mail carrier “missed” when attempting to put it in her mailbox and the letter fell on the floor. Or perhaps the mail carrier accidentally put it the wrong mailbox. Somehow, someone else—Dora suspects one of the many neighbors in her large apartment complex—found the letter and opened it. One of her neighbors is a client. Perhaps it was him, or his wife. Then someone, perhaps the same person who found the envelope on the floor, or maybe someone else, made copies of the letter. They also printed and copied her advertisement on backpage.com. They posted copies of both the letter and the ad on telephone poles all around Dora’s neighborhood in

the Southside. In the copies of her backpage ad, they circled her face with a thick black marker. Suddenly, everyone knew she was a sex worker, *and* that she was HIV positive. That was just the beginning.

She started getting phone-calls from strangers who called her transphobic and racist slurs. She changed her number. They somehow got her new number (this is perhaps evidence to support the theory that Dora's neighbor who is also a client was involved). She screened her calls and didn't answer. They left her messages, in which they threatened to kill her. Then one day she came home and someone had spray-painted on both her front and back door, "Get out faggot or we will drag you out." Whenever she answered her door, even when she was expecting someone, she held a knife behind it.

Her income took a hit because she lost many clients who no longer wanted to see her because of her HIV status, which was now public—though Dora insists that she always uses a condom. Instead of just peaceably ending their business with her, a few personally confronted her—either on the phone or in person at her home. They angrily accused her of putting their lives at risk by having sex with them, even though Dora maintains she always uses a condom, and they too consented to and in fact facilitated the sex. Dora, however, still feared that she could be prosecuted for engaging in unprotected sex without first disclosing her HIV status, a felony in Illinois.

To counter the constant threats from past clients and neighbors, one day, she, with a help of a few other trans women of color, replicated a letter from a doctor stating that she was HIV negative. She posted the letter on her backpage.com profile, hoping that it would deter past clients from hurting her and potential clients from being too afraid to buy services from her. She presented a hard-copy to her few remaining clients as they walked through her door, hoping to

try to convince them that she was HIV negative. Unfortunately, business didn't improve much and her neighbors and visitors of backpage.com still harassed her. She moved in with a distant cousin. But was kicked out, because the two got into a big fight. She was homeless. She was increasingly combative whenever other trans Latina women tried to reach out to help her. Last I talked to her she had taken the greyhound across the country and was selling sex and crystal meth to survive. The initial posting of the letter from her doctor and her backpage.com advertisement, a significant act of violence, lead to a cascade of many other violences in her life.

Intimate Partner Violence

In addition to occupational violence at the hands of clients, intimate partner violence is a common theme in stories from trans women. Early in my research, a non-binary trans Latinx activist asked me if I could add questions to my interview schedule. I answered yes, and asked what they (the activist's preferred pronoun) had in mind. They said that domestic violence, specifically at the hands of a partner, was a huge issue in the trans Latina community, and that it would be great to have some data to back up what they, and other members of the community, know to be true. I added a question about domestic violence to my interview schedule and tracked down those whom I already interviewed to ask them about their experiences with intimate partner abuse. Indeed, domestic violence is widespread, with all but one woman admitting to being physically, emotional and/or financially abused by an intimate partner, and many more than once. The prevalence of domestic violence, I argue is intimately related to the widespread belief that trans women, especially trans women of color, are unlovable.

When I first interviewed Katalina and asked whether she experienced intimate partner abuse she replied, "I never had that problem, girl. I ain't that stupid" and laughed. As I got to know her I noticed that she would get very excited whenever she met a new man. Once we

arranged to take an Uber together to a discussion in Pilsen about issues affecting trans Mexicans. She took the Uber to me first, so she was already in the car when I got in. She had a huge smile on her face. Before I could ask why she seemed so happy she said, “Soooo, I met someone.” She had her phone in her hand ready to show me pictures of him. He was a client, who was interested in more. She exclaimed, “That means he knows what I do and doesn’t care! He’s okay with it.” Previously, when Katalina, who is 27 years old and Puerto Rican, was complaining about sex work she said:

I hate it. Not only is it degrading but you realize that no one is ever gonna fucking fall in love with you if you keep doing this. Every time you fall in love with a guy they just use you anyways. I always find out they are dating someone or they are still married or they were lying to me the whole time.

These words, which reveal the added stigmatization of engaging in sexual labor, popped into my head as she excitedly scrolled through pictures of the guy and I became skeptical. She looked at me and giddily shrugged her shoulders up and down and said “maybe this guy is the one.” As I would find out, these ideas are propagated by what could be called the “monogamy myth,” (the belief that a woman is not complete until she is in a monogamous relationship with a man) which has a particular appeal to some trans Latina women as it reaffirms their gender transition as a traditional Latina woman. A few weeks later their relationship ended when Katalina found out he had a pregnant girlfriend. Katalina suspected that he was pretending to “want more” with her so that he could have sex that he would otherwise have to pay for.

About a month later Katalina met Sergio--a 20-year-old masculine, Puerto Rican. A few months passed and the relationship remained. Then they moved in together. She regularly posted on facebook about how he was her “king” and how happy he made her. However, we started noticing that every once in a while Katalina would have bruises on her arms. Jesenia, aware of the high prevalence of domestic violence in the trans Latina community, asked directly if he

treated her well, and then, if he ever hit her. Katalina laughed and assured her that no, he actually did treat her well, like a “queen” in fact. Finally, one morning she posted on facebook that she was bleeding, that he smashed her phone, and she needed help. She also wrote that things were not as happy as she made them seem.

We tried to get a hold of her, and then were all calling each other frantically to see who was successful. Finally, a friend with a car was able to pick her up, and I was able to chat with her via facebook messenger. She said that the physical abuse had gone on for a long time, and that she was tired and depressed. A few days later, however, she was back with Sergio. Before anyone could confront her about it, she posted on facebook that she had exaggerated and that things between her and Sergio were good. It just took couple of days for him to assault her again, and she left him. This time, she insisted, for good.

Not only have almost all of the interlocutors have been in abusive relationships with cisgender men, but a few had slightly deformed noses as a result of abuse. I had initially assumed the crooked noses were from nose-jobs (a popular procedure, typically one of the first done for people who seek cosmetic intervention) that had gone wrong. I learned that this was not the case from Xiomara, a 45-years-old black Puerto Rican. Xiomara is tall, thick, and goddess-like as she walks, hips swaying, long hair flowing, and head held up high. It was her interview that provided my first insight into the cause of misshaped noses. After I asked Xiomara if she had even been in an abusive relationship, she replied:

Uh, my first boyfriend used to beat me. And that went on for six months. And, actually, the last incident we were fighting, he took my head and hit me against his knee and broke my nose. That’s why my nose looks like this.

Ya know, I was...this was the only time I would allow someone to hit me. After that I was like “no.” Um, but you know, I was young and so in need of love, so even though he beat me I loved him. And it’s insane that each time he would tell me “sorry

I'm sorry" and you feel comforted by the same person that caused the pain. Um, so not anymore I would not allow anybody to hit me.

(pause)

Ya know, we...dating is so complex, and it's hard to find a man that will walk side by side with you. When you find somebody you wanna hold on. And sometimes you don't really set boundaries and you're not equipped enough you allow people to treat you in certain ways, um, but it is an issue, a big issue [in the trans Latina community] I would say.

After my interview with Xiomara, I asked the others with seemingly broken noses about their relationship histories. They all revealed that ex-partners also broke their noses.

While a discussion of the complex psychological reasons why it is difficult for women to end relationships with abusive partners (and to be clear, the onus is not just on them) is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this research does add a vital insight to why it may be especially challenging for trans women, and trans women of color in particular. At the premiere screening of the docu-series "Been T/here," transmasculine, mixed-race, Puerto Rican director Andre Perez explains why he decided to pursue the project. He wanted to show what the media leaves out in its portrayals of trans people, and especially trans people of color—their everyday lives, and that they can love and be loved. He shared that when he came out to his mother as a trans man, one of the first things she said was, "Who will ever love something like that!?"

Non-binary Mexican activist, Karari Olvera, who is featured in the docu-series, elaborated, "There is a narrative that we are unlovable after a certain point. Like, everyone loves the drag queen but the drag comes off, trans people don't." The belief that trans people are unlovable is also evidenced by Katalina's earlier statement that, "99.9% of the time men wanna use trannies for sex" (in this case, she presents sex is mutually exclusive with love). The belief that trans people are unlovable, and that trans women of color in particular can only be sexual objects may contribute to why it is exceptionally difficult for trans Latinas to leave violent

boyfriends. As I argue in chapter seven, having a masculine appearing cisgender boyfriend affirms trans women's woman-ness. Moreover, as revealed by the experiences described in this chapter, I argue that having a boyfriend suggests that one is loved and thus lovable, affirming not just their womanhood but also their personhood and humanity.

Of course, having a male partner also has material benefits. Moriah's many boyfriends in the U.S. allowed her to save up money for her various surgeries by providing her a place to live rent-free. Thirty-six-year-old Mexican Lizette was able to stop doing sex work when she started seriously dating her now-husband. Clarita, who is 43 years old and Mexican, never engaged in sex work. She attributes this to having a husband as well.

Uh, I know a lot of friends who do it for survive. When they come to the country, they come with no support. Sometimes it's no another option. Um, I was lucky, for example when I came to the United States I came with, uh, visa, like a tourist, and then once I was here, I met the person who is now my husband. So, I always have the support of him. I have no necessity to start doing anything else. But I know not everybody is as lucky as I was, so...

Perhaps because of these rare instances, what would be the .01 percent according to Katalina, is why Katalina stays hopeful that she will finally find "the one," a partner who will both love and support her so she might withdraw from sex work. Hegemonic narratives around monogamy, romance and relationships circulating in the U.S. promote the idea that women are not whole unless they have a man. For trans women of color who engage in sex work, having a man not only completes them as women, affirming their gender as women and specifically one who is economically taken care of by a man, more broadly, affirms their humanity as lovable people. Furthermore, male partners can also offer financial and material support, which is otherwise scarce. The gendered violence of the "monogamy industrial complex" lays the foundation for domestic violence in trans Latina sex workers' lives, which are already riddled with various other types of violence.

Police Brutality

Chicago is known as an epicenter of police brutality. And while there is increased attention to police brutality (DOJ 2017), there are some victims of police violence that remain under-documented and invisible. Within communities of color, sex workers, transgender individuals, and undocumented people are even more susceptible to police brutality, and because of this, it is riskier for them to make their experiences known. In this section, I show how trans Latina women are already and always viewed and treated as sex workers by the police, even before they ever begin engaging in sexual labor, and if they have begun, when they are not actively working. I also argue that sex work increases one's exposure to policing and police brutality, and vice-versa: how policing and police violence encourage participation in sexual economies of labor. Lastly, policing has even graver consequences for transgender Latinas who are undocumented, presenting another layer of violence to people already criminalized and targeted. Through the experiences of transgender Latina sex workers, I illustrate how policing targets certain racialized and gendered groups in specific ways to uphold neoliberalism, gentrification, and mass incarceration and deportation.

When Katalina was in her early twenties and still living in Florida she had her first encounter with the police. She had not yet started engaging in sex work, and was morally opposed to it. She also had not begun transitioning, and was “against” that too at the time. In hindsight, she believes she was “in denial,” about both sex work and transitioning. When she had her encounter with the police, she was “cross-dressing” and drunk. She also had un-prescribed Xanax in her purse. An officer stopped her on the street. He offered her money to have sex with him. She refused. Then he charged her with prostitution—a bogus charge---and illegal possession of a controlled substance without a prescription, which is a felony. She suffered the

consequences of the charges for over six years, explaining, “I had warrants, I was in and out of jail. They put me in the man’s jail, too. The last three years I had to run away.” That’s how she ended up in Chicago.

Juana is a 40 year old Afro-Puerto Rican transwoman, and her experiences with police reflect those of the rest of the women with whom I interacted. She has been arrested multiple times, some of those times when she was actively soliciting clients, and other times when she was not. Like Katalina and Juana, many other women report that they have been arrested for and charged with prostitution when they were not actually soliciting sex, or even thinking about working, but instead simply just walking outside as a trans woman of color. Given that Chicago is considered one of the most racially segregated cities in the country, the women report that they faced more harassment, in general and by police officers in particular, in parts of the city where they stand out because of their race. Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of Juana’s arrests occurred when walking around Boystown, Chicago’s “gayborhood.” Boystown is predominately white and middle and upper class. It is located on the Northside, between Lake Michigan and the Chicago Cubs Baseball Stadium—two high grossing commercial districts.

Legal scholar and transgender activist Owen Daniel-McCarter (2012) describes the criminalization of queer people of color in Boystown. Boystown media feeds racism against queer people of color, and especially youth, by running stories that reproduce the idea that criminal activity is connected to the influx of youth from the “South and West Side,” both areas populated predominately with black and Latinx residents. Local Chicagoans know that the “South Side” and the “West Side” are codes for these racial groups. In response to concerns about “crime,” the local business alliance went as far as spending thousands of dollars to hire off-duty police officers to supplement the protection offered by on-duty city police officers. The

policing of young queer people of color is a particularly racialized violence because Boystown is a space of freedom and acceptance for queer white youth. Many queer youth of color think that they can go to Boystown and finally feel welcomed and safe. Sadly, they encounter the polar opposite. This is one example of how policing colludes with liberal white LGBTQ politics, gentrification, and the prison industrial complex.

For trans women of color who actively engage in sexual labor, policing and police abuse increases their encounters with violence. One night a client was at Katalina's small studio apartment. Before any services were exchanged he made it clear that he would not pay. Katalina immediately told him to leave, but he did not. Katalina panicked. The client, much bigger than Katalina, then tried to rape her. She was able to thwart him and he eventually left, threatening to kill her while calling her transphobic and racist slurs.

When Katalina was being harassed in her home, the harrowing situation made her wish she could call the cops. Yet she knew that if she did, she would probably be the one who was criminalized. She was engaging in prostitution, was transgender, and was Puerto Rican (Chicago is home to a long history of police brutality against Puerto Ricans). Based on her own experiences and the knowledge of her friends' experiences, she expected no protection from the police, and even worse, expected more violence. She said to me shortly after the incident, "I didn't call them because they will discriminate against me." Many transwomen are harassed by police officers—physically, verbally, and sexually.

While Katalina sells sexual services in her home with the help of websites and apps that match clients with workers, sexual laborers who solicit customers on the street are most likely to experience criminalization and police brutality. They report regular verbal, physical, and sexual harassment from police officers. Dora, for example, was regularly called a "faggot" by the same

officers who policed “the stroll” on the Southside of Chicago. Others report that cops let them go without being arrested, if they engaged in sexual activities with the officers.

In sum, many transgender Latina women engage in sex work because of employment discrimination that is the result of systemic transphobia and racism, and the ways in which the two systems of oppression come together. Sexual labor, however, only increases their likelihood of experiencing transphobia and racism by virtue of its illegality and heavy policing. In other words, policing is a gateway through which they experience intersecting sexism, racism, and classism. While they turn to sex work because they cannot secure employment in the formal sector, since sex work is illegal criminal records only further decrease one’s employability in the formal sector. This makes it even harder to leave sex work. Therefore, criminalizing transgender Latinas for engaging in prostitution in order to support themselves only forces them to participate in illegal activities long-term, creating cycles of marginalization.

Part 2: Bureaucratic Violences: Deportation and Identification

Similar to trans clients in the work of legal scholar and activist Dean Spade, the trans women with whom I interacted “faced both the conscious bias of transphobia that produces targeted violence as well as numerous administrative catch-22s that render basic life necessities inaccessible” and had “no hope of finding legal employment because of the bias and violences they faced, and therefore turned to a combination of public benefits and criminalized work—often in the sex trade—in order to survive” (Spade 2015:12). My ethnographic data reveals that beyond being a “catch-22,” what anthropologists have called “bureaucratic violence” (Graeber 2012) exacerbates other types of violence, such as physical violence, and ultimately creates more harm to trans Latinas. I specifically describe the bureaucratic violence experienced through the deportation industrial complex, which polices undocumented individuals, and state

documentation, which polices transgender individuals. I also reveal the two institutions come together to regulate the lives of undocumented trans people, and how people attempt to subvert both interlocking systems.

Encountering the Deportation Machine

Katalina, Juana, and Dora were each born in Puerto Rico and are thus technically U.S. citizens. The increased exposure to policing that trans Latinas face is exacerbated when trans Latinas are undocumented. Undocumented women are legally vulnerable and sought after by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Because sex work is illegal and thus policed, it increases undocumented transwomen's chances of encountering ICE. In the fall of 2011, the Cook County Board of Commissioner enacted a sanctuary ordinance, enabled in large part because of the support of Commissioner Chuy Garcia. Two years later, the city of Chicago followed suit and adopted an ordinance that prohibits the cooperation of ICE agents with local authorities, such as the Police Department and the sheriff's office--which runs the jails. Therefore, individuals who were charged with misdemeanors, such as traffic violations and prostitution, would no longer be sent to immigration detention centers. Notably, however, the Illinois Department of Corrections--which runs the prisons--continued to co-operate with ICE. And some trans Latina who were picked up by the police when engaging in sex work were still sent to ICE after Chicago became a sanctuary city. In general, sanctuary only offers limited protection to undocumented individuals. For example, it cannot prevent ICE officers from raiding businesses and people's homes.

Under the Trump administration the number of deportation is significantly increasing across the country. In his first days in office, in January 2017, Trump signed an executive order blocking federal funding to sanctuary cities. His administration has targeted the city of Chicago

in particular. White house press secretary Sean Spicer suggested that Chicago's gang-related violence is due to its status as a sanctuary city (Skiba 2017). In fact, ICE raided sanctuary cities with the specific intention of pressuring the cities' authorities into cooperating with them. Reports by human rights agencies show that violence, including sexual violence, regularly occurs during ICE raids, and transgender women are especially vulnerable to this (Martinez et al 2014). Once in detention centers they are misgendered, placed in male detention centers where they are verbally, physically, and sexually assaulted. They are denied their hormones, which has serious effects on their mental health, and prohibited from being themselves.

Encounters with police are just the beginning of a long process in which their gender is violently policed. If they are arrested and detained, they are forced to stay in men's prisons where there is a high chance that they will be assaulted by prison guards and other inmates. Some even report being ridiculed by judges when they appear in court. While the women shared things with me that many thought they would not, there was just one that caused silence to fall upon people in the midst of telling their stories: whether they spent any time in jail or prison, especially for those who spent time immigration detention centers. I sat with the women in their silence, often as tears slowly fell, and did not probe. Oftentimes they changed the topic and asked for the next question. And the interviews carried on. I took their silences to mean that what happened to them when detained was so horrific, even more horrific than the violences they regularly encountered and easily described to me, that it was better not to think of them.

What happens when a transgender person is deported? One story I heard again and again during my research was about a "friend of a friend" who came to the US to transition safely. She had experienced violent persecution in her home country for not conforming to the gender binary. Applying for asylum is a long process that requires various types of social and financial

capital. So instead of applying for asylum, she, like Selena and many others, came to the U.S. without proper documentation. Despite the odds, she got here safely. She started transitioning. She finally realized her dream of living freely as her true gender. Then, she was scooped up by ICE. And deported. She returned to her natal country mid-transition, or sometimes as a gender completely different from the one as which she left. Sometimes she is killed immediately upon arrival. Once she was beaten to death by group of men with bats. Though I was unable to find specific examples, I do not doubt the stories' veracity. They are also meaningful because they act as warnings to other Trans Latinas, especially those who are undocumented. The state does not care about you. It would rather you not be here, rather you be dead.

Just as unemployability encourages involvement in sexual economies of labor, and involvement in sex work only increases unemployability, the relationship between sex work and detention by ICE is similarly cyclical and mutually reinforcing. Sex work, and policing of sex work, not only increases chances of being detained by ICE, but imprisonment by ICE encourages sex work. Such is the case with twenty-nine year old Josefina. Josefina began doing sex work precisely because she was incarcerated for being undocumented. She was arrested during a raid of the exploitative and filthy poultry factory in which she worked. When she was released from the detention center, she found herself in an unfamiliar town in rural Illinois where she had no money and nowhere to go. In order to have food and eventually a place to sleep that wasn't in the streets, she turned to sex work. Josefina's story illustrates how state sanctioned and socially acceptable forms of racism (in the form of anti-Latinx policing) and transphobia work against trans Latina women in the United States in ways that only reinforce their political, social, and economic marginalization. Furthermore, policing intersects with and sustains transphobia,

racism, the deportation regime, which all work together to create virtually inescapable cycles of violence and marginalization.

Bureaucratic Violence through State Documentation

The requirements, documents needed, and bureaucratic processes for changing your name and gender on legal documents vary by state, and requires that a person navigate through a maze of different offices and people, including various bureaucrats and other representatives of the state. This labyrinth of people may or may not have been trained to handle cases of non-conforming individuals or who might be outright transphobic, racist, and hostile to immigrants. Furthermore, state representatives have different interpretations of what is required, causing those who desire a name or gender marker change even greater frustration.

In order to change your name you first need to fill out three forms: “Request for Name Change,” “Publication Notice of Court Date for Request for Name Change,” “Order for Name Change.” You must make three copies of each form, and file them at your county’s courthouse. In addition to being submitted to the court, the second form must be submitted to your local newspaper, which must publish that you are petitioning a name change, once a week for three weeks in a row. The publication lists your given name and your new name, as well as the date and location of the court hearing. Not only does repeatedly this “out” people as transgender, but also exposes them to potential violence by making whereabouts public on the day of the hearing. The notice must appear in the newspaper for the first time at least six weeks before your hearing date, and the newspaper must issue you a Certificate of Publication.

You must also pay three separate fees, a filing fee, a publication fee (to publish the notice in the newspaper), and a certified copy fee. You may apply for fee waivers for all three, but the newspaper has the right to deny your waiver to publish with them. The average cost in total in

2012 was \$337, and by 2017 was at least \$400, according to my discussions with women. On the day of your hearing, you must bring the three main forms, the certificate from the newspaper, a photo ID, and documentation related to your criminal record. The judge may grant or deny the request. If granted, you need certified copies (there may be a fee for each copy) of the Order from the Circuit Clerk. In order to change your birth certificate, you must then bring one copy of the order to the Bureau of Vital Records, an office of the Illinois Department of Health. To change your social security card, you must bring one certified copy to the social security office, and to change your license you must bring one to the DMV. Each of these institutions, has its own procedures for changing your name, and requires more documents beside the Order from the Circuit Clerk. Many trans Latina women have reported that bureaucrats working these institutions either did not know what to do, or outright turned them down because of what they suspected was transphobia and/or racism. Moreover, each institution requires more fees. The Department of Health, for example, requires at least three forms and a \$15 fee.

But before you attempt to do all of this, you must make sure you are allowed to so. In order to petition to change your name you must be 18 years or older, and have lived in Illinois for at least 6 months. This may be difficult to prove for those who are homeless, and “travelers” or sex workers who travel around to service clients or avoid particularly violent customers, partners, or police officers. You cannot petition to change your name if you have committed a felony, unless the felony has been pardoned, or you finished your sentence for the felony at least ten years ago. Dora, for example, was waiting for the ten years to pass since she completed her prison sentence for her last felony. Luckily, as of August 23, 2013 a felony conviction for prostitution is no longer a sentencing option. However, before then, if you were convicted with three misdemeanor prostitution charges you could be convicted with a felony. Therefore, some

women are still waiting out their ten years to change their name because they were charged with prostitution felonies before 2013. You cannot apply for a name change at all if you have been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor that involved criminal sexual abuse with a minor, or any other offense that require you to register as a sex offender. These restrictions have particular implications for trans gender people, especially transgender people of color, who are at higher risk of being registered sex offenders (Lovell 2012).

Changing one's gender on legal documents in Illinois, like the majority of other states, is even more difficult than changing one's name. You must submit: medical report form, psychiatric report form, physician's statement, or "other acceptable documentation to indicate that a change has taken place or the customer is in the process of undergoing the gender change to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The DMV used to require a "court order reflecting the change in gender" and no longer does. Yet, the DMV websites states, "However, such a court order shall be considered as best evidence to process the gender change."

Therefore, a bureaucrat may request it if he is not convinced by the other documents. Most of the women report that a letter or affidavit from the physician certifying that they are taking clinical steps to change their gender is enough, if the person working at the DMV is accommodating to begin with. Changing your gender on your birth certificate, the document that first announced your existence in the world, is perhaps the most difficult and non-affirming of transgender. You must submit an "Application for Gender Reassignment", which includes an Affidavit by Physician After Completion of Gender Reassignment."

The affidavit is based on the assumption that gender is changed via "operations." This biological understanding of gender excludes less invasive alterations to the body

such as the use of hormones. Previously, surgeries such as breast augmentations counted as an “operation.” However, over the past 10 years or so courts look for genital reconstruction surgery in particular, which is economically unobtainable for most of the women with whom I interacted. Not only is gender reconstruction surgery for trans women very expensive and invasive, it is also uncommon. None of my women had it nor wanted it, as they did not believe that their gender is determined by their genitalia (see also Plemons 2017). Moreover, not every trans person goes through or desires to undergo a (genitalia) “transition.”

More broadly, transgender lawyer and activist Owen McCarter-Daniels points out that “you need gender affirming health, then you also need health insurance, a trans friendly doctor, a doctor who speaks your language.” All of these are more difficult for trans women of color, trans Latinas, and especially undocumented trans Latinas. Further, Owen points out that “puts all of the power” in the medical institution to evaluate someone’s gender. This is a remnant of two long histories where in which transgender people were understood primary as psychiatric and medical abnormalities, and people of color were used and abused for medical experimentations.

Being able to legally change your name and gender has even greater barriers for trans women who are immigrants. First is the complication of having an immigration violation on record. Owen reports that many trans immigrants plead guilty to immigration violations, just to be removed from the men’s prison as soon as possible. This results in what Owen calls many “false-positives.” Immigration attorneys are likely unfamiliar with the legal issues affecting trans folks and often encourage trans clients to please guilty, unaware of the ways it will affect their physical and psychological being for years to

come. Also, as Owen notes, not being able to change your name open ones up to more negative interactions with police. Trans women of color are more likely to be stopped and harassed by police, and their mismatched ID may prolong encounters with police and welcome more transphobic harassment.

Another complication is that of being born outside the U.S. Before you attempt to change anything in the US, you must first change your documents in your natal country, which varies from country to country. Further, Owen elaborates, “and it’s a human system so a lot of the time, if you pass or know someone the person will take care of it. If not, then you’re screwed.”

Having an ID that does not reflect your performed gender affects a trans person in other ways. After Katalina was complaining to one of her regular clients about how she wanted to quit sex work, he arranged an interview for her at a factory that his friend owned. She nervously went to the interview. The interview was going well, and Katalina was excited when the potential boss took her documents into the next room to make copies. She thought she finally had a job. A wall with a large window separated the two rooms, therefore Katalina saw everything that subsequently transpired. Katalina just recently started transitioning, but is called “*pura pesca*”, or, “very fishy” by many in the trans Latina community. In other words, she very easily “passes” for a cisgender woman. When the potential boss looked at her ID before placing it in the copy machine, he noticed that although Katalina has a very feminine appearance, the name on her license was still the name she was given at birth: “Justin.” There were a few other cisgender male workers in the room. The boss passed Katalina’s ID around and they all took turns looking at it and laughing. Needless to say, she didn’t get the job.

Having an ID that "outs" you can have more dangerous consequences. Before this humiliating experience Katalina showed me her ID when we were sitting around CHI. While she showed it to me, pointing to her picture and her gender marker she said, "I'm scared to go anywhere. When I went to the DMV the other day [to try to change it] they were giving me problems. This is another reason why I never wanna go out." Katalina was concerned that if her ID "outed" her, she could experience physical violence. While she did not experience physical violence at the factory, she did experience emotional trauma and humiliation. Therefore, these bureaucratic and discursive violences cause and increase material and physical violences.

It is important to note, that while the state's understanding of gender has dangerous consequences of transgender people who wish to change their gender marker from "male" to "female" or vice-versa, it does not even acknowledge those who are nonbinary or genderqueer. The state's failure to acknowledge their very existence, is of course, an act of violence.

"The Law Doesn't Reflect my Experience:" The Double Power of Legal Documents for Undocumented Trans Women

Amongst undocumented trans women, official forms of identification have a doubly weighted meaning. Trans individuals desire identification that affirms their gender, while undocumented people desire IDs that allow them to stay in the country. And when undocumented women use other people's IDs, or more specifically women's IDs, they are not only subverting the immigration system but also gender system. Brenda is one of the lucky few who was granted asylum. She now has a legal ID, however, it contains her given name and a male gender marker. While she is now legally able to be in the country, this does not free her from various forms of harassment, including police harassment, because her ID fails to affirm her gender. Reflecting on her experiences of being undocumented before she was granted

asylum, she said, “The law doesn’t reflect my experience. It was easier to work under a women’s name than it is to look for jobs legally now.” Like Katalina, she has had a hard time getting jobs because her ID does not match her gender presentation. She more easily slid under the radar when she illegally used an ID that was not her own. She felt more like “herself” when she was undocumented, because she would rather be recognized as a woman than a legal resident. The importance of being acknowledged and affirmed as women, at the expense of being undocumented is also evidenced by the many women who chose to come to the country with proper unauthorization so that they can be. The prioritization of gender over abiding with the law is also reflected in women’s engagement in sex work to finance their transitions despite its’ illegality. Brenda’s statement that the “law doesn’t reflect my experience” is worth repeating.

There are other ways that the women would also subvert the nation/gender system upheld by state identification. Matthew Hull (2012) suggests that bureaucratic documents are “mechanisms for protecting the integrity of the government,” but that also become localized and “are often the means through which it is undermined.” Some women would try to “take matters into their own hands” by falsifying their name change petitions, which counts as a class 2 felony and could therefore interfere with legally changing their documents in the future. Trans Latinas, and those working and living around trans Latina sexual economies, consider this “fierce.” Another reason one is permanently barred from changing their name, however, is if they have been convicted of identity theft. Therefore, many undocumented trans women who were seeking safety and gender validation by illegally using other people’s IDs are excluded from changing their names, which in turn has a number of negative repercussions for their psychological and psychical well-being.

“Okay, This is My Story”: Facing and Overcoming Bureaucratic Violences

I met Brenda downtown after she finished her day at her job training program. We walked down Michigan Ave and I was little overwhelmed by the amount of people—it was happy hour, and everyone just got out of work. Brenda, on the other hand, said she loved walking around the area each morning on the way to her program during rush hour, and every afternoon after the program during happy hour. I asked her why, and she replied, “Cause I get to see all the good looking men in suits,” and we both laughed. She looked longingly at the expensive restaurants we passed on “The Magnificent Mile” and said she would love to work as a waitress in one of them. She would be so good at it and get such good tips, she explained. I tried to keep up with her as she sped ahead of me through the crowd, in her all black, tight, professional attire, wearing black rimmed glasses and her hair in a low, tight pony tail. We finally found a restaurant that was affordable. We ordered and sat down. It was her birthday a few days prior so dinner was on me.

Over the meal, I asked Brenda about her process of getting asylum. Previously she had hinted at how hard it was, but I waited until we know each other better before I asked. As we ate, and checked out guys walking by, she told me her unbelievable story.

Brenda was deported a total of three times back to her home country of Mexico before she was granted asylum by the U.S. government. I had just learned that being deported makes one ineligible for asylum, so I asked Brenda, in disbelief, how she was able to get asylum. She heard through a friend about an organization that provides free legal services for people seeking asylum. She called and explained her situation, and they said she was ineligible. But she did not give up. She called again the next day, and someone else answered who was willing to work with her, despite the fact that her case was “very complicated.”

Brenda said that her secret was being “consistent.” I thought out loud that her lawyer must have been amazing, and she quickly said, “That’s what I told my lawyer but she told me ‘No it is YOU who did it!’” Brenda said she was consistent, she told her story “again and again, which is hard, no one wants to talk about it.” She knew two other people applying for asylum at the same time, a trans woman and a trans man, and eventually the man stopped the process because he was “breaking down” and told Brenda: “I can’t do this, I don’t wanna talk about everything.” Brenda first told her story to the asylum officer, and each time she told it she was careful to say the exact same thing. She claimed that she was never questioned about fear when she crossed the border, and was never told that asylum was an option. Therefore, she crossed the border the first time, and she kept returning illegally after being deported because she feared for her life she didn’t know she could apply for asylum. Perhaps most importantly, she emphasized that she experienced more violence in Mexico after being deported because she returned as trans woman. When she first migrated she was just a “gay boy” who was trying to escape harassment. When she was deported, being in Mexico as a trans women was much worse than being an effeminate young man. She reflected, “Growing up I was bullied by my family and my community. I was molested. But, then, going back trans, was even worse.”

In the middle of applying for asylum, Brenda’s lawyer also discovered that Brenda had a felony conviction in the U.S. for which she completed a six month prison sentence ten years ago. Brenda took a plea bargain for something she says that “she shouldn’t have” to avoid more jail time. She explained that at the time of the trial she was “tired” because her parents had recently passed away, and her lawyer told her to just serve the six months’ time, so she listened to him. Additionally, she had been given ten years of parole, which she just completed. Yet, now the felony was making her asylum case complicated. Brenda’s lawyer had hoped that because it had

been ten years since Brenda completed the sentence and that her parole has ended, it would not be held against her. But then she discovered that another two years it had been added to the 10 years, because during the initial parole period she was deported once. Therefore, while her gender category officially had been changed, she cannot change her name for another year, when the total 12 years of parole are over.

While I was shocked at all the complicating factors, I knew that Brenda was involved with drugs in the past, and I suspected that there were even more confounding circumstances. I asked if she had any drug charges.

She coolly leaned back and said “ok this is my story.” She viewed her asylum case as intimately related to her practice of *Santería* (an Afro-Caribbean religion). Long before Brenda got involved with drugs and even before she was deep into her transition, Brenda’s *madrina* (or mother via the religion, who was also a respected trans Latina sex worker and drag performer) gave her a reading with the *caracoles* (the cowrie shells) through which *santeras*, or (practitioners of *Santería*) communicate with the orishas. Eleggúa, who speaks for all of the orishas during a reading, said that she will have problems with drugs in the future. Brenda didn’t believe them, she barely even drank. But soon after the reading she was farther into her transition and was unable to find a job (I will further explore *Santería* in chapter six). She began working at *La Hueca*, a trans Mexican club that is central to Chicago trans Latina sexual economy of labor. It was at *La Hueca* where she started doing drugs. At this point in her story, Brenda leaned even farther back in her chair and with an incredible amount of swag said, “and I was a business woman so...” We both laughed.

She said the heaviest drug sentencing in Chicago is typically for crystal meth. She was arrested once with 4 ounces of meth, and could have been easily sentenced to serve 25 to 30

years in prison. They gave her four years and she only served 18 months. She was also in possession of cocaine and Special K (ketamine, a dissociative anesthetic). “And the thing about Special K,” she explained, is that it is easier to get *not* in the US.” She knew someone who dealt K in Mexico and she took it over the border all by herself. “I did crazy things,” she said. She was charged with trafficking, possession, distribution, and manufacturing. But they couldn’t sentence her for all because they didn’t have the evidence of the chemicals. She hid them, she explained and then smiled. I asked her what she told asylum officers about the drug charges, and she sat back and thought. Brenda said she told the persecution, “I don’t know about the laws. I know my own experience and my experience doesn’t reflect the laws.”

Throughout the fourteen months of my research, Brenda was tirelessly searching for a job and was getting frustrated because she wasn’t securing one. After hearing her incredible story, I told her that if she got asylum against all the odds, then she can get a job too. She exclaimed, “I should be an asylum coach!” Why Brenda was granted asylum when so many people with less complicated factors, or even no complicating factors at all, are regularly denied is beyond me. It highlights, however, how inconsistent the legal system, and the immigration system more specifically, is in the United States. I asked her one more time, unable to hide my shock, how in the world she got asylum. She answered, “Maybe it was with the help of the orishas.”

Conclusion

I have shown how various levels of violences work together to harm and marginalize transgender Latina women. And I have argued that the different types of violences are mutually reinforcing, working together to ultimately create more violence and marginalization in trans Latinas’s lives. Transgender Studies has begun to reveal how legal, social, and economic systems are harmful to transgender individuals, yet more analysis must be devoted to the specific

injustices of being a racialized transgender person. Recent examinations of violence in Latinx studies under-examine gender altogether (e.g De Leon 2015), even in its dominant forms, which doubly excludes transgender people. Examining violence against transgender Latinas fills this gap. The peculiar manifestations of violence in trans Latinas' lives also deepens understandings of the workings of violence against minoritized subjects in the U.S. more broadly, specifically its cyclically reinforcing nature.

The immigration system, deportation regime, and local police department encourage the participation in sexual labor, while decreasing employability in the legal sector. Yet, participating in sexual labor only increases violent encounters with police, ICE, and clients. State bureaucracies that fail to acknowledge the existence of transgender people increase individuals' chances of experiencing violence in the formal employment sector, and from police officers and strangers. Popular discourses suggest people of color and trans individuals are unlovable, and justify violence against them, making it more difficult for trans women of color to leave abusive relationship, where they are further victimized. In the next chapter I turn to racialized and sexualized discursive violences, which result in the imagination of trans Latina women as "*fantasias*" in sexual economies of labor and the U.S. nation overall. That the women are viewed as "*fantasias*" only further justifies violence against them.

Chapter 3: ***“Somos Una Fantasia”*: The Racialized-Sexualization of Trans Latina Women**

The meeting at Community Healing Project (CHI)⁷ had just wrapped up. It was organized by Brittnei, a trans Latina HIV counselor at CHI, to brainstorm ways to increase outreach to transgender women of color, especially those involved in sex work. Brittnei is 27 years old, Mexican, and was born and raised in Mexican Chicago. She started working at CHI a little over a year ago, and since then has stopped doing sex work full time. She is relatively financially stable because of the salary from CHI and the support she receives from her natal family. Sometimes, however, sees a “sugar daddy” who will pay her to spend time with him, and have sex. She is light-skinned, able to pass as a cisgender woman, and though she has a lot of tattoos, she is conventionally beautiful and normatively fashionable. Her ability to pass and her steady income in the formal sector award her privileges that many of the others in the room do not have. All six attendees were trans Latina women who were actively involved in Chicago’s sexual economy of labor in order to meet basic financial needs. In addition to the greasy fried chicken and sides we bought for the meeting at a nearby Popeye’s, there was also delicious Puerto Rican food cooked lovingly, and likely proudly, by Brittnei’s mother. After the meeting, we stood around, listening to music, chatting, and joking as we continued to pick at the leftover food, even though we were all already pretty full. During a pause in the conversation, Estrella recalled the time a cisgender male client had a headache and took a few of her hormones pills, thinking they were Tylenol. Everyone burst into laughter.

Earlier during the meeting part of the gathering, Brittnei introduced me and described my project, hoping the data gathered would help CHI combat HIV/AIDS in the community. All the

⁷ Pseudonym

women at the meeting were enthusiastic about the project and excited that a researcher sought to understand their experiences. As we hung around after the meeting, the conversation drifted back to my research. Jackie, a tall, thick, 45 year old Mexican woman with dark tanned skin, and long, straight, bleach blonde hair, looked at me from across the room and firmly stated the phrase that would define my research: “*Mira, Andrea, somos una fantasía.*” Everyone agreed. I would hear these words, “*somos una fantasia,*” again and again.

In this chapter, I draw from Deb Vargas (2014) and C. Riley Snorton (2017) to explain how trans Latina women are fetishized and hyper-sexualized, by virtue of their race and gender, and, moreover, how the two come together. I describe how the women actively participate in and capitalize on the racialized-hypersexualized fantasies about them to make money in the sexual market. And I argue that they also racially and sexually fantasize about others, including white cisgender male clients. Chicago’s trans Latina sexual economy of labor, then, is a place where various racialized and sexualized fantasies collide. I demonstrate trans ways in which the Latina body, as an exoticized and problematized Other, is critical to the imagining of the U.S. nation. Specifically, I draw attention to the paradoxes of the hypersexualization and commodification of trans Latina bodies as being both crucial and threatening, alluring and repulsive, in U.S. sexual economies of labor, and to the nation overall.

Transgender Deviance: Histories of Policing and Regulation

Trans Latinas are exoticized by virtue of their nonnormative gender *and* race. The primary way, however, my interlocutors felt fetishized and hypersexualized was related to their transgender identity. As evidenced in recent legislative attempts around the U.S. to put into law gendered division in access to regulate public bathrooms, transgender folks threaten dominant and oppressive systems of gender and sexuality. According to cisnormative ideology, a person’s

genitalia objectively determines their gender. Women have vaginas, and men have penises. Notably, however, research has shown that infants are commonly born with ambiguous genitalia (Blackless et al 2000; Sax 2002). Yet, the dominant gender ideology would have us believe otherwise. The violent policing of gender variant individuals – in medicine, census, education, and religion, for example—has been foundational to the construction of the United States.

It is also important to note how the regulation of gender identity coincides with attempts to govern racialized others. The European colonialization of the Americas and the founding of the U.S. nation was intertwined with the management of gender and sexual relations via widespread and institutionalized violence (Smith 2005). This included the eradication of gender non-binary Native Americans in some parts of the country. In California, gender-variant individuals were fed to Mastiff dogs (Miranda 2013). While consistent throughout the nation's history, the regulation of gender has historically increased during times of social insecurity and moral anxiety (Foucault 1984; Stoler 1995). For example, several cross-dressing laws were passed in the 1850s, when the country was in the midst of the industrial revolution and people were flocking en masse to new, industrial cities. The Gold Rush in California was also occurring in the 1850s. The gender of Chinese people was often publicly discussed and disparaged, including in newspapers. It was believed that men were difficult to tell apart from women based on their appearances and comportments. This fed racist ideas that Chinese people were physically, morally and socially inferior to European-Americans.

Local police departments were, and continue to be, as we will see throughout, key enforcers of gender norms, especially during periods social unrest. Wartime, for example, is time when insecurities about American supremacy and foreign otherness are high. During and after the Vietnam War two riots occurred in response to police abuse against gender nonnormative

people. Both are important in transgender history of the United States. The first was the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco. While the cafeteria regularly serviced queer individuals and those involved in illegal economies, the management was particularly annoyed by a table of noisy transgender women. They called the police. Officers arrived, and one grabbed a woman and tried to drag her away. She threw her coffee in his face and then many of the other customers joined in, flinging their food and silverware, damaging the physical infrastructure of the restaurant, and physically attacking the police officers.

On the other side of the U.S., the Stonewall Riots took place a few years later in 1969. The Stonewall Inn was a mafia-run gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York. It was frequently raided by police officers who demanded bribes, but these exchanges were typically brief. The encounter that would transform into the Stonewall Riots was not. Police began arresting workers and patrons and forcing them into paddy wagons. People started tossing coins at the officers, mocking their corrupt practices. Puerto Rican and Venezuelan transgender activist Sylvia Rivera threw a beer bottle and swayed the crowd's gentle taunting to more violent resistance. Many others started hurling heavy objects at the police officers. The crowd grew into a full-blown protest that is accredited with inciting the Gay Liberation Movement (Stryker 2008). It is important to note that Rivera, along with Marsha P. Johnson, are often erased in narrations of the riots and its importance in LGBTQ history, which has been controlled by the white, middle-class, cisgender gay community.

Transgender people have been flattened in historical and popular representations, allowing stereotypes of them as sexually-deviant subhumans to propagate. This is especially true for transgender people of color and others who do not adhere to respectability politics. In his book *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*, sociologist Joshua

Gamson (1998) argues that gender variant people became more visible in the popular media in the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of talk shows. Those who could fall under the trans umbrella, including cross-dressing persons, were regularly featured on the new genre of entertainment. They were presented in a way that emphasized their deviance and suggested that they were “freaks” (Gamson 1998, as cited in Glover 2016). No doubt, transgender people are gaining more visibility in the media and the public sphere, and are seeking to redefine the figure of the transgender person, especially the transwoman. Yet a respectability and beauty politics have emerged. Figures like Caitlin Jenner and Jazz Jennings seek to normalize transgender, but are white and rich. Laverne Cox and Janet Mock are two trans women who challenge the current trend. In addition to being black, they also acknowledge past involvement in sexual labor.

Yet, as queer theorist Julian Kevon Glover (2016) demonstrates, a hierarchy of respectability and beauty standards exists amongst trans women of color as well (see also Harper 1994; hooks 1996). Glover argues that Laverne Cox and Janet Mock, while important role-models for many, have come to represent all trans women of color. This is problematic, Glover argues, because they engage in “transnormativity,” or “a process shaped by adherence to respectability politics, heteronormative standards and class privilege” (340). Those outside of transnormativity, like the black trans pornographic performer and entrepreneur TS Madison, are viewed as subhuman by media consumers. Glover also suggests that by standing in for *all* trans women of color, Cox and Mock do not allow space for the particular experiences of Asian and Latina transwomen. In short, the belief that trans people, and especially those are poor, sex working, and of color are sexually deviant and less human persists.

The continued dehumanization of transgender people is evidenced by the fact that the number of transgender people murdered has been rising, most of them women of color. The year

2017 was the deadliest year on record with 28 people murdered. As of the writing of this dissertation, March 2018, six women have already been killed in just three months. Ally Steinfeld was one of the victims, at only 17 years old. Her body was mutilated and burned. Notably, her genitals were stabbed multiple times.

The sexually-deviant transgender scapegoat has been invoked recently in national politics, in ways that demonstrate the particular threat the trans *women* pose to the cis-stem. This year, North Carolina signed the “Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act” into law, and a number of other states including Arizona, Indiana, Nevada, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin recently proposed similar legislation popularly referred to as “bathroom bills.” “Bathroom bills” require transgender people to use the bathroom of the gender assigned to them at birth, and they have stirred up considerable debate in the public sphere. Proponents of such bills garner support by describing a mythical cross-dressing man (the transgender woman) who enters the women’s bathroom only to sexually assault cisgender women, especially young girls. The gender and race of the imagined assailant and victim in this national story are key to understanding formations of gender, sexuality, and race in the United States. For example, Mike Huckabee, past governor of Arkansas and candidate in republican presidential primaries of 2008 and 2016, publicly said the following:

If your seven year old daughter, if she goes into the restroom, she cannot be offended and you cannot be offended if she is greeted there by a 42 year old man who feels more like a woman than he does a man [pause]. Now I wish someone had told me when I was in high school, that I could have felt like a woman when it came time to take showers in PE. I’m pretty sure I would have found my feminine side and said ‘Coach, I’d think I’d rather shower with the girls today’ [audience laughs].⁸

Huckabee’s words, and the audience’s response, are telling for a number of reasons.

Huckabee and his fans expect and accept that all men, especially young men, want to sexually

⁸ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kicker/these-are-the-transgender_b_9752266.html

assault women. The normalization, and even celebration, of sexual assault committed by cis-gender white men was also recently revealed by Donald Trump's unabashed bragging about "grabbing" women's "pussies" without their consent.

A complex double-standard emerges. White cisgender men are allowed to sexually assault women without repercussion. Sexual assault, then, does not make them predators, but instead healthy, normal men. White cis men are freed from criminal and moral responsibility for sexual violence while all transgender women, on the other hand, are presented as abhorrent sexual predators, from whom we must pre-emptively protect our children. In actuality, transgender women are much more likely to be victims of violence, including sexual violence, in a bathroom than cisgender women, even children (Herman 2013).

Notably, the female victim is silenced and often completely erased in narratives that celebrate sexual violence committed by white cis men. However, a victim suddenly emerges when the alleged predator is a transgender woman. The figure of the transgender predator elicits such fear, that sympathies for a victim are stirred. It is significant that the imagined victim, or potential victim that we must protect via legislation and other societal norms, is a white girl. The figure of the innocent white girl has long been invoked to scapegoat certain populations, such as black cisgender men, and justify violence against them (Donovan 2006; García-Peña 2016; Wanzo 2008). The predatory queer body and the "bathroom girl victim" are a new formulation of a national strategy that aims to uphold race, gender, and sexual hierarchies and has existed since the abolition of slavery when anxieties about protecting white women's sexuality increased.

Assumptions about the sexual deviance of transgender women underlying this debate shaped a discussion that unfolded at CHI about what it means to be a "*fantasia*." Jackie shared

the story of her experience working as a maid for a white cisgender man, who demanded that she wear a short skirt around the house, with nothing underneath, so he could see her penis throughout the day as she cleaned. The tone of the room, previously party-like, immediately became somber. While the outfit was pleasing to the employer, the women could relate to be humiliated in a way that emphasizes their sexual (and racial) deviance.

Relevant here is foundational anthropology Mary Douglas's (1966, 3-4) tension of the tensions between purity and danger, and particularly how "many ideas about sexual dangers are better interpreted as symbols of the relation between parts of society" and that "the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors." Others (Foucault 1984) have contended that as taboos maintain society, they encourage the tabooed behaviors to become fetishized. Sexual taboos, especially those related to gendered and racial boundaries, have been an important part of the development of America as a nation (Kitch 2009), and trans Latina sexual economies of labor are a place where the power of such taboos is thrown into relief.

After Jackie first stated "*Somos una fantasia*," she continued, "They are paying you so much not because you are so good at sex, but because they are so *enfermo* ("sick"). Cuz they have a wife at home, she just doesn't have a *pene*." Everyone nodded in agreement. Jackie's statement that clients are "*enfermo*" because of their desire for erotic encounters with transwomen can be interpreted in a few ways. It can read as an assertion of transnormativity, heteronormativity, or even transphobia. A man should not want to have sex with a transwoman, or someone with a penis, if he has a cisgender wife at home. However, according to a transgender logic, Jackie may be pointing out the wife's lack in comparison to transgender women. More importantly, I argue it is a critique of the client, not because he is sexually attractive to transgender women, but because he is attracted to her by virtue of her sexual

deviance according to gender norms (represented by the wife). Jackie is ultimately critiquing the fantastical and dehumanizing discourses about transgender women that shape clients' interests—desires and discourses that oscillate between fear and disgust, on the one hand, and domination and perversion, on the other.

Serena, a 46 year old, Peruvian immigrant, enthusiastically chimed in, “When you hire a cis woman sex worker you always know you will penetrate her, when you hire a gay male sex worker you know he’ll always penetrate you, but when you hire a trans you never know.”

Serena’s words reflect the larger sentiment that trans women are sexually desirable to clients precisely because they transgress gender boundaries and challenge heteronormative—and even homonormative--sexual expectations as women with penises who may both penetrate and be penetrated. Such fantastic possibilities are turned into paid transactions and commoditized.

Another poignant example of the fetishization of trans women in the sex industry can be found in porn. Many women who engage in making porn reported that they were hardly ever filmed having sex with other people. Instead, they were most often filmed alone, laying on their backs, legs spread, slowly masturbating, with the camera positioned squarely in front of their penises. The images that are produced from such scenes feed the fascination with transwomen who are advertised in the porn industry as “chicks with dicks.”

The Hypersexual Latina

Many women expressed that they were fetishized by clients and society more broadly not only because they were transgender women, but because they were trans *Latina* women. The sexual objectification of trans Latina women not only rely on an eroticization of transgressive gender and genitalia, but also on the exoticization of their ethnic and racial identity. Their gender deviance seamlessly comingles with racialized ideas about Latinas, their bodies, and their moral

worthiness. Literary scholars Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman (1997:8) describe how Latin Americans and Latinxs are subject to “hegemonic tropicalizations” or “instances in a long history of Western representations of the exotic, primitive Other” which are deployed through certain discursive strategies. Stereotypes of Latinxs as hypersexual were propagated throughout U.S. history via popular discourses claiming that Latinxs, and especially Latina women, are sexually promiscuous or “*caliente*,” and therefore out of control of their bodies and emotions. This is also evidenced in the figure of the “*loca*” or “crazy” Latina. The male counterpart, slightly less out of control of himself, is the “Latin lover,” the “Casanova,” or the “Don Juan” (Aparicio & Chávez Silverman 1997). Famous Latina performers are subjects to these stereotypes, and also strategically profit from them as they play them up. Notable examples include Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, and Sofia Vergara. In her analysis of Jennifer Lopez, and more specifically her butt, cultural theorist Frances Negrón-Mutaner (2008:189) writes:

A big *culo* does not only upset hegemonic (white) notions of beauty and good taste, it is a sign for the dark, incomprehensible excess of “Latino” and other African diaspora cultures. Excess of food (unrestrained), excess of shitting (dirty), and excess of sex (heath) are its three vital signs. Like hegemonic white perceptions of Latinos, big butts are impractical and dangerous. A big Latin rear end is an invitation to pleasures constructed as illicit by puritan ideologies, heteronormativity, and the medical establishment through the three deadly vectors of miscegenation, sodomy, and high-fat diet. Unlike the functionality of breasts, big bottoms have no morals, no symbolic family function, and no use in reproduction. Or, in Simone de Beauvoir’s classic words, “the buttocks are that part of the body with the fewest nerves, where the flesh seems an aimless fact.

While this description of the Latina butt, and thus by extension the Latina body and Latina subject is apt, I would add that the *culo* has no shortage of nerves, but is feeling. According to popular stereotypes, Latinas are deeply feeling, sensual, over-emotional, and moody. All of these qualities make Latina women naturally skilled “lovers,” or sexual partners.

Alongside the hypersexual Latina woman is the hyper-fertile Latina immigrant who illegally crosses the border to birth “anchor babies” in order to exploit US resources. These beliefs about Latinxs were solidified into numerous policies aimed at controlling and suppressing their reproduction. For example, the government has funded the widespread forced sterilization of Mexican-American and Puerto Rican women across the country (Gutierrez 2008; Lopez 2008). As discussed in the introduction, the forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women by the mainland, was a way to control the population, “modernize” the island, and thus justify the U.S. intervention in it. Scholars (Chavez 2008, Gutierrez 2008; Lopez 2008; Parédez 2001) have argued that stereotypes of hyperfertility produce and protect symbolic (and sometimes physical) borders that distinguish Latinxs from white Americans who are sexually appropriate, morally superior, and thus deserving of citizenship and its benefits. Racist portrayals of Latinxs as inherently hypersexual are still rampant in contemporary U.S. society, and are becoming more widespread and acceptable to state publicly under the presidency of Donald Trump. Furthermore, Trump’s campaign platform rested on the promise to “build a wall” to keep Mexicans out of the U.S..

Transgender Latinas, however, are not believed to biologically reproduce needy, brown offspring and thus are not threatening to the nation in the same way the mother of the “anchor baby” is (though I show in chapter 5 and 6 that trans women do "mother" and socially reproduce). Yet, she is still sexually excessive and morally deviant by virtue of her Latinx-ness. Moreover, her *queer* Latina-ness positions her as a specific threat to whiteness, which is bolstered by heteronormativity and cisnormativity (Duggan 2002). Queer theorist Deborah Vargas’ concept of *suciedad* (dirtiness) is useful here. Drawing from Muñoz’s (1999) use of “*chusmería*” and Ferguson’s (2004) argument about the pathologization of queer individuals and

people of color, Vargas presents “*lo sucio*” (the dirty) to capture queer Latina excessiveness. *Lo sucio* refers to excessive femme Latina-ness that persists despite neoliberal and homonormative projects that seek to cleanse and eliminate the nasty, filthy, and obscene from queerness, sexuality, and larger society. *Sucias* (dirty women and femmes) threaten hetero and homonormative racial projects that seek to sanitize the world of filth and grime. As queer, minoritized femmes, transgender Latinas are indeed *sucias*. Their genders surpass the gender binary, and their sexual activities are viewed as exceptionally excessive and morally corrupt because they will never be (re)productive but are only in the pursuit of pleasure (or “dirty” money).

I argue that trans Latinas are more than just *sucias*, however, because their transgender bodies pose a particular threat to white cisnormativity in the U.S. that exceeds that of queerness which may still be mapped onto cisgender bodies. In order to center transgender (womanness) over other types of Latina queerness, C. Riley Snorton’s theorization of blackness and transness in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017) is especially helpful. As he excavates the historical record for a black trans presence, Snorton finds multiple intersections between blackness and transness. He explains how the condensation of transness into the category of transgender is a racial narrative, and how blackness finds articulation within transness. I similarly am interested in how transgender womanness is informed by *Latinidad*, and vice versa. Transgender Latina women are hypersexual and fantastical on both sides, so to speak. Both their race and their gender, and moreover, how they two come together and inform each other, are sexually fantastic. The hypersexual Latina and the sexually deviant transgender women meet in the figure of the trans Latina, and result in a hyper-hypersexualization.

Fantasy on Both Sides: The Hypersexual Transgender Latina & The Hypermasculine White Male

The women regularly expressed that they were perceived as *fantasias* on account of their race and gender, in sexual economies of labor and in the larger national imagination. The literature on sex tourism is helpful for understanding the ways in which trans Latinas are imagined as racially and sexually excessive, and simultaneously sexually attractive and repulsive. Scholars (e.g. Bolles 2008; Cabezas 2009; Williams 2013) of sex tourism have described the global processes that hypersexualize and commoditize people in the global south, and I add onto this, the fetishization of clients by trans sex workers. Stereotypes, stemming back to colonialism, of the hotness, wildness, and fruitfulness of certain countries (many in Latin America) have been mapped onto (black and brown) inhabitants' bodies. Such imaginings impel sex tourists from the global north to spend considerable amounts of time and money to travel to have sex with people in the global south. Yet, one does not have to leave the U.S. to experience the exotic. In her study of strip clubs in the South, Frank (2002, 135) reveals that white men go to black strip clubs to "slum" or travel to "foreign, exotic, supposedly inferior cultures." Customers of trans Latina sex workers seek such exotic sexual experiences. In their research for the US Department of Justice, Raymond, Hughes, and Gomez (2001) found that when men write about buying sex in the US (for example, in online discussion boards for clients of sex workers), they almost always mention the race or ethnicity of the sex worker. Raymond et al. argue, then, that men come to expect racially stereotypical behavior from the women they pay for sex. Whereas the report examined clients of cisgender women sex workers, my interlocutors' experiences suggest that in addition to being stereotyped by clients according to their race, transgender women are also stereotyped on account of the perception of gender transgressions.

To be sure, trans women with whom I interacted frequently theorized that their customers wanted to have sex with them because they were Latina and thus construed as “exotic” and “freaky.” Elisa, a 39 year old, light-skinned, Mexican woman stated about her clientele: “They make me feel like because I’m Latina, I have the sex appeal, and that I have the looks that are very exotic, that maybe other races would not have.” Interestingly, the women said their clients could be described in one of two ways. They either said their clients were 1) “all white” or 2) “all races,” “*de todo*,” “*de todo razas*” including, “African American, some Latin, Arab, Indian, Lithuanian, Asian, Jewish, Puerto Rican, Mexican” and “*Griegos, romanos, musulmanes*.” What is important to note is how they imagine clients imagine them. The notion that they are fantasies is partly based on their clients’ desires. The women have intimate knowledge of racialized sexual economies, and have been made to feel like fantasies inside of them. That they described their clients in these two ways (“all white” or “all races”) signals the centrality of the white gaze upon them. It also suggests the capaciousness of the figure of the hypersexual trans Latina and its ability to resonant with people of various races, including those of color. Both are confirmed by the larger social and historical construction of transgender Latinas outlined earlier.

The detailed descriptions of clients, and clients’ desires from them, also indicate that sex working trans Latinas, too, engage in racialized and sexualized fantasizing of clients. In her study of sex tourism in the Dominican Republic, anthropologist Denise Brennan (2004) shows that while clients’ imaginings of women is important to the sex tourist enterprise and the larger social, historic, and economic patterns by which it is framed, clients aren’t the only ones imagining. Sex workers also imagine their clients. The trans Latina women with whom I worked similarly fantasized about clients as dominant males in a neo-colonial and anti-immigrant context.

Serena, a 36 year old Ecuadorian woman, was excited to tell me about her clients. It was clearly something she has thought a lot about. She began with:

I have one theory about why clients they like transgender. Yes (smiling). Guys they like transgender, they all, well not all, 80% guys driving trucks. Driving trucks. Chevy, Yukon, Escalade, that big truck, allll the guys they come into my house with that truck, or expensive cars. Very expensive cars, they like, they come in like that. In the United States, big trucks have been associated with rugged, working-class manliness.

Serena suggests that men who are interested in purchasing sexual services from her and other transgender women are hypermasculine. However, she also says that their trucks are expensive, so while they may embody a working-class aesthetic, they are financially secure, according to Serena. Serena may depict her clients in this way for a few reasons. One, as I demonstrate in chapters seven, trans woman's womanliness is affirmed by cisgender male partners who are read as both masculine and straight (see Kulick 1998). That her clients are financially secure suggests that she is a "higher class" sex worker, and not a "lower class sex worker" who must service anyone, especially poor men.

Serena's words also paint a picture of an "All-American man." Recall that Serena is currently undocumented, as she is in the process of applying for asylum. Her statement that such an "All-American guy" would be sexually interested in her, and spend his money on her services, on one hand flips the typical power dynamics, while at the same time reinforces the white American male consumption of transgender Latina women.

Serena is a "traveler," a sex worker who travels to different states to see clients. Oftentimes travelers find clients in other states online, and then arrange to travel to them. Sometimes, women just travel to a state and advertise their presence online, hoping that their novelty will attracted a number of patrons. Serena travels around the country. She continued to explain to me that "A lot, a *mayoría* of the republican states, they really enjoy transgender." The

“All-American man” invoked above is not only white but also politically, and likely socially, conservative. Her statement that republicans seek her services serves as a critique of members of the political party and their hypocritical behaviors, especially with regard to sex.⁹ Serena then went on to talk about a specific client:

I have an army client. I have one client who have one leg. Oh I love him, very hot, very very very hot (her voice becomes low and sultry)! Very muscular! Beautiful! Then we he get in the bed I notice he take something from his leg. You know, we are very, we have to be very careful, you know, I thought maybe he take a gun or something. And then when I see he take his leg out, oooohhhhhh stupid me, very handsome guy with no leg because he told me he was in Afghanistan and one bomb coming, oh my god it was terrible. Oh baby, I support the troops, and I give the best, THE BEST special in my life (she laughs loudly). And for a long time. Cuz people they don't understand maybe we're doing nothing right, but Yes! We give our services to the troops! We support the troops. It's a contribution! They have, you know, we are a fantasy.

Serena reveals that in addition to being hypermasculine, white, economically stable, and republican, at least one of her clients are also in the military. She also describes an encounter with one patron that involves a number of exchanges of power. This was one of the few instances where a client was spoken about favorably. She begins describing him as “very hot,” “muscular,” and “beautiful.” Yet once he is in the bed, while Serena thinks he is taking out a gun, he tries to discretely remove his prosthetic leg. His vulnerability coupled with the masculine roots of his injury becomes an erotic fantasy in this moment. She learns of his trauma and recognizes his tenderness and decides to treat him with extra care, giving him the “best special” of her life. She somewhat sarcastically says that despite people thinking trans Latina women “do nothing right,” they “support the troops,” as the troops symbolize the masculine (white) U.S. nation. Her statement challenges the assumption that trans Latinas are un-American, cannot contribute to the nation, because they only burden and threaten it. It is precisely through her excessive sexuality

⁹ Larry Craig, for example, was a republican senator who was arrested for soliciting public sex in a men's bathroom in an airport in Minnesota. His political agenda, however, was very homophobic.

that she is able to “support” the nation. However, she ends with “We are fantasy.” Therefore, as she highlights her subversive power as a transgender woman, a Latina, and a sex worker, she also highlights how it derives from her fetishization as a transgender Latina.

In sum, both sex worker and client exoticize each other in ways that draw upon, reinforce, and sometimes challenge gendered and racialized stereotypes of the U.S. nation— a nation that is white, masculine, and supported by the queer labors of women of color.

Cartographies of Racial Fetishization: Sex Workers’ Understandings & Uses of Race

Women developed rich racial cartographies to explain their clients’ desire for them. Dora, a 37 year old Puerto Rican, explained to me during my first interview with her:

We were fetishes. Back in 2000, I wanna say early 2000, 1990, and the 80s, transgender women were, um, were fetishes, right. Then when you threw in a Latina who was exotic, just anything that was not the norm, that was not black, was exotic, right. I think the one that tokenized us and exoticized us, the ones that really were into the trans Latina, were the white men. The white men were just all over Latina trans women. They thought we were the freakiest. They still do.

When I asked her to explicate, she continued:

Ya know (sigh), you categorize things, cuz that’s how you see it right. So when it came to trans women, trans Latinas were the exotic ones, the more freaky ones, the more feminine, the more passable, the more beautiful ones, right. If you wanted a transwoman that was hung, or a transwoman that was more, um, just hung, period (laugh), that’s when the black trans girl popped in. If you wanted something petite and small, that was the Asian girls. We’re all full of categories and everyone had their own pick, right. So, yea. That’s how it is (laughter).

Dora outlines a complex racial-sexual cartography. She exposes racialized understandings that trans sex workers themselves hold about one another, and she theorizes about the racialized desires of white cis male clients. According to Dora, and many others, Latinas are “exotic” to white cis male patrons, who purchase their sexual services and “fetishize” them precisely because of their “exoticness” as Latinas. Notably, Dora evokes the stereotypically light-skinned,

brown Latina, which she opposes to black women. She reflects the popular anti-black misconception that Latinxs are not black.

Therefore, comparing trans Latinas to perceived standards of white beauty, while imperative, does not capture the full racial-sexual landscape. Dora also compares Latina women to other women of color when explaining clients' desires. While all trans women are "fetishes," she says that trans Latinas are more "exotic" than trans black women, who are the "norm" by comparison. She supports scholars (e.g. Chavez 2008; De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2003) who describe how Latinxs' racialization is intimately tied to the perception that they are all immigrants and thus foreign, unlike black folks who are ascribed legality. While race, gender, and sex come together to uniquely hypersexualize trans Latinas, others racialized understandings of bodies that exist in the U.S. imaginary also traffic in trans Latina sexual economies of labor. For example, Dora states that trans Asian women are "petite and small," and black women are "hung."

The belief that lighter-skinned Latinas have a special value to clients in trans sexual economies was not just held by trans Latinas themselves, but also by non-Latina trans sex workers. Non-Latina white women admitted that Latinas were sought after because they were exotic. Non-Latina black women's explanations were more complicated. For example, Cleo, a 60 year old non-Latina black trans woman sex worker explained to me once I told her about my project:

They're (trans Latinas) considered prettier cuz their skin is lighter and their hair is longer and stuff like that. You know, a lot of people look at what beauty is today. And plus, a lot of the black guys they like them cuz all they ever knew when they was growing up was black transsexuals, or black black girls, or black. So it's something different for them. A lot of them (clients) seem to be really homophobic and everything. But you know, honey, when nobody is looking, you know, it's all another show, a whole another story, honey. Mmmhhmmm.

Cleo also lays out a racialized hierarchy of beauty. The qualities that purportedly make trans Latinas more attractive--lighter skin and longer hair--are more closely aligned with dominant notions of attractiveness, or white beauty ideals. According to Cleo's logic, trans Latina women are more beautiful than trans black women because they have whiter appearances. These beliefs are held not only by clients, but also trans women themselves, like Cleo, and rest of the women. Indeed, while many trans Latinas participated in beauty practices to emphasize their "Latina-ness," such as getting hip and butt implants and wearing red lipstick, they simultaneously sought to make themselves appear more white. All but one of the interlocutors straightened their hair, for example. A number also had rhinoplasties, to make their noses look more Anglo, or less black and/or less indigenous. We again see how race and gender work together, because in addition to being less black and/or indigenous, a smaller nose is also less *masculine*.

I would like to return to Dora's comment that black trans women are "hung." While describing client's fantasies, she, like Cleo, is also offering important insights into trans understandings of race and gender. Of course, the popular belief amongst trans women of all races, including black women, that black transwomen are "hung," echoes the stereotype that black men have big penises. It may seem like Dora is deliberately denying trans black women of their womanness when she repeats it. And indeed, there are tensions between non-Latina blacks and non-black Latinas in Chicago's trans community that sometimes erupt into verbal and physical fights, and a way to try to hurt another transwoman is to question her woman-ness. And, as I discuss in the next chapter, black trans women are perceived in the general public as more masculine. Yet, it is important to recognize that within trans understandings of gender, a penis, even a large one, does not necessarily make a trans woman less of a woman (see also Plemons

2017). One person once said to me when explaining her gender identity, “I am a woman, and I have a penis. I would never surgically remove my penis, it doesn’t bother me at all. It’s kinda like an earlobe. It’s just there.” Therefore, I argue that among trans sex workers, the notion that trans black women are “hung” does not completely disavow their femininity, but instead just inflects it with larger cultural beliefs about blackness.

However, black women did indeed have to contend with the notion that blackness is associated with masculinity. As explicated by the youngest interlocutor, an Afro-Latina who is introduced in the next chapter, even black cisgender women are popularly viewed as more masculine than non-black cis women because of their racialization. In her foundational piece on controlling images, Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 268-269) describes the image of the “matriarch,” or an “overly aggressive, unfeminine woman” that acts “as a powerful symbol for both black and white women of what can go wrong if white patriarchal power is challenged.” With larger notions about blackness in the US in mind, the belief that black trans women are “hung” does not suggest that they are men. Rather, it suggests that they are “less feminine” women, like their cisgender counterparts. Non-black Latinas, who are viewed as less black and more white than black women, are perceived as “more feminine” and “more passable” (as cisgender women) than black women by trans sex workers of all races.

In her study of Brazilian exotic dancers in New York City, Maia (2012, 89) centers race as she argues that women’s identities as dancers and women were primarily marked by their nationality, which “becomes both a stigmata that defines [their] identities, and a prop for the performances through which this very identity is constituted.” Trans Latina sex workers are marked by non-normative gender *and* race. Because their gender does not fit into the binary,

their experiences reveal more complex ways that identity constructs and is constructed in the US sex trade, all the while intersected by American configurations of race, gender, and sex.

However, their engagements with race are not simply made in comparisons to whiteness, but instead within a complex racial cartography. In her book on race, affect, and neoliberalism in Newark, New Jersey, anthropologist Ana Ramos-Zayas (2012) details how Latinxs, especially those new to the U.S., “learn race” and engage with conceptions of blackness in the United States via racialized ideas about affect. They do so in the process of becoming neoliberal subjects, or a subject capable of navigating urban space that is particularly hostile to people of color. For example, across the races, blacks are viewed as aggressive and Puerto Ricans are thought to be passive. Significantly, however, Ramos-Zayas’ informants actively use racialized stereotypes, including ones about themselves, to survive in America. My interlocutors similarly learned and used complex racialized stereotypes and hierarchies, as exemplified by Dora and Cleo’s theories, to make it in Chicago’s racialized sexual economies of labor, their only option for survival. Additionally, they reported performing the figure of the hypersexual Latina to clients in an attempt to establish steady business relationships and increase the amount of compensation they would receive. Sex working trans Latinas created and codified their own understanding of racial categories.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how both Latinas and transgender women are hypersexualized, and moreover, how transgender Latinas are doubly hypersexualized, or “*fantasias* on both sides” in the U.S. racial-sexual imagination. The social construction of transgender Latinas as “*fantasias*” leads to their objectification and dehumanization, which has violent consequences to explored throughout the rest of this dissertation. This chapter also

reveals that while transgender Latinas are racially and sexually fetishized in Chicago's sexual economies of labor, they also fantasize about others in ways that reinforce, challenge, and refashion racialized-sexualized stereotypes. They develop and utilize their own conceptions about trans women of other races and ethnicities, and about white cisgender male clients. They create complex racial and ethnic cartographies that take various intersections of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and class into account. In the next chapter I will focus on crucial role that blackness plays in both how trans Latinas are imagined and treated by various institutions, and how trans Latinas sex workers imagine themselves and others. I argue that trans Latinas attempt to distance themselves from Blackness as they aspire for the feminine.

Chapter 4: **“Blackness is Often Tied to Masculinity”: Blackness in Trans Latina Sexual Economies & the Racialization of Gender**

In Chapter 3, I described the racialized-sexualization of trans Latinas, which makes them “fantasías” in Chicago’s sexual economy of labor, and in the U.S. nation more broadly. This leads to another question, that of blackness and how it haunts Latinidad, and trans Latinidad in particular. I argue that Latina-ness, in general, is haunted by blackness. This can be seen in the stereotypical image of a Latinx, which is a person with tan skin. While this figure has slightly more melanin than a white person, which distances them from the white norm and make them exotic, their skin color is notably *not* black. This popular representation effectively erases the large Afro-Latin American and Afro-Latinx populations that exist throughout the Americas. Many Latin American countries from which many Latinxs have cultural connections have sought to exterminate blackness in various ways, from forced miscegenation to outright genocide (Wade 1997). In national conversations about undocumented persons in the U.S. that have been unfolding for the last decade or so, black immigrants are often completely erased. Therefore, black individuals have been expunged both discursively and physically in both Latin America and Latinx America. Yet black Latin Americans and black Latinxs exist and persist.

The way that blackness haunts Latinidad is also evident in an expression that is popular throughout Latin America, Latinx America, and especially the Caribbean: “¿Y tu abuela, donde está?” It is often said in critique of someone who attempts to identify with whiteness and upper-class status, but is viewed as unable to make such claims. The person does not have to be black, per say, but may be many shades of brown that are not considered white. The expression suggests that they, like many others of Latin American descent, have a black grandmother. Yet it also suggests that the person is trying to keep their black grandma hidden. While, on one hand,

the hypothetical question recognizes that many Latin Americans have black heritage, it also acknowledges that many actively try to hide it. Latinxs in the U.S. may possess these understandings of blackness, as well as those that are unique to the United States and the city of Chicago. The ways in which multiple, complex racial ideologies come together is outside the scope of this chapter, especially considering that there are multiple shades of blackness and brownness in many Latin American contexts. It is pertinent, however, that both ideologies suggest a racial hierarchy where blackness sits at the bottom, and that colorism and anti-Blackness is rampant among Latinxs in the U.S. (even including those who may be considered black or identify as black).

It is also important to recognize the racial specificities of Chicago, a space that is deeply racialized and segregated. In their study of the city, anthropologists Nicholas De Genova and Ana Ramos-Zayas (2003) propose that within the hegemonic binary of whiteness versus blackness that sustains white supremacy in the U.S. nation-state, Latinxs are precariously racialized in relation to both. Because of their unfixed racial status in a context where blackness is subordinate (both historically and current-day), De Genova and Ramos-Zayas contend, that Latinxs in Chicago strategically attempt to decrease proximity to blackness. This is especially true, Ramos-Zayas points out, for Puerto Ricans, who have been racialized as black both as individuals (often depending on appearance) and a population at various points throughout history (during Operation Bootstrap, for example). De Genova and Ramos-Zayas show how race is spatialized in the city. Many Latinx neighborhoods acts as “buffer zones” between poor black neighborhoods and white neighborhoods shrinking from “white flight” (De Genova 1998, De Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2004; Squires et al 1987). De Genova & Ramos-Zayas (2004) argue that Puerto Rican Chicago developed on the North West Side because people chose to live close

to affluent, white Chicago in the north east. The very term “buffer zone,” suggest that there are various points of convergence between blacks and Latinxs, where blackness may be negotiated and/or disavowed by Latinxs.

While the specter of blackness may threaten all Latinxs, it poses a particular gendered threat to trans Latina women. Blackness, even that mapped onto cisgender women’s bodies, is viewed as masculine. As foundational black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (1999) demonstrated in her theorization of “controlling images,” black women are popularly perceived in the United States as aggressive, unfeminine, and thus masculine. Trans Latina women, I contend, distance themselves from blackness not only for racial aspirations, but also for gendered ones, as they seek to embody femininity.

Transgender Studies is just beginning to grapple with the politics of race in the United States, primarily through historical, discursive, and theoretical examinations of the black transgender subject (Ellison et al 2017; Greene 2015, 2014; Snorton 2013, 2017). Despite dominant racial ideologies in the national imagination which suggest that Latinxs cannot be black, they indeed can be and are. Yet, drawing from Latin American understandings of race, blackness may not be static or fixed, but can be transitory, relational, and contested. Therefore, centering the transgender Latinx subject reveals complex and understudied ways in which gender is racialized in the United States, specifically how race (and blackness in particular) and gender are intricately intertwined such that one’s perceived location on the racial matrix shapes that person’s access to particular gender categorization. Moreover, an ethnographic perspective exposes how race and gender are negotiated by individuals in their everyday experiences.

In this chapter, I first describe the experiences of Mercury, a young black Latina trans woman, the way in which she is racialized by others, especially other members of the LGBTQ

community and social services providers. I argue that her blackness, in conjunction with her transgender and mental disability, is read as unreasonable and aggressive. Second, I argue that racial passing (specifically passing as *not* black) informs gender passing (as a woman); Mercury's inability to "pass" as a non-Black Latina affects her ability to "pass" as a woman. Third, I examine how trans Latina women distance themselves from blackness and masculinity in sexual economies of labor through the figure of the black, cisgender male client, who is constructed as exceptionally violent. Overall, I argue that blackness is especially threatening to trans women as they try to access femininity and I draw attention to the racialization of gender.

Mercury: Trans, Latina & Black

Dominant ideologies in the U.S. popular imagination that racially-hypersexualize trans Latinas depend on the simplistic and stereotypical notion that all Latinxs are brown, ignoring the fact that white and black Latinxs exist. In an effort to resurrect the realities of black bodies within a context of anti-black sentiments that chose to deny the existence of black individuals within the Latinx community, I will examine the intricate ways in which black trans Latinas are racially and sexually stereotyped via the experiences of Mercury, one of the youngest interlocutors.

The Rainbow House¹⁰ is a mid-size homeless shelter with just 45 beds. It is open to all homeless people, but it is known for being a safe haven for LGBTQ individuals in particular, and hence the majority of its residents at any given moment are members of the LBGTQ community. Its staff are trained in "LGBTQ competency" and are well connected to Chicago's numerous LGBTQ organizations. In addition to providing a place to sleep at night, Rainbow House offers

¹⁰ "The Rainbow House" is a pseudonym, and the specific details of the home have been altered to protect interlocutors' identities. Regardless, the major themes from the data are represented.

an on-site job training program. A resident must apply for and be accepted into the job training program, which only has 15 spots. Successful applicants exhibit “ambition,” “willingness to work,” and “good behavior.” Unlike many homeless shelters where all occupants are required to leave early in the morning (presumably for work or school) and return at a specified time in the evening, Rainbow House residents who are participants in the job-training program are allowed to hang out in the community room during the day. The program is only three days a week, for four hours a day, and has not had a high demonstrated success rate. Participants get to know each other pretty well as they spend a lot of time hanging out in the community room. Because of this, The Rainbow House has a more familial feel than most other homeless shelters.

Word had spread to me that a young trans woman recently started staying there. I headed over one chilly spring morning to find out if this was true. The assistant director, Sam, a 45 year old cisgender gay white man, greeted me at the front desk. We had met before, and see each other somewhat regularly at LGBTQ events in the city, so he knew about my research project. He confirmed that the newest resident was indeed a trans girl, who was just 18 years old. After thinking for a few seconds, he said he thought she might be Latina, but wasn’t sure. He then lowered his voice, leaned in closer to me, and said that he had admitted her to the job-training program, but was having doubts about whether this was the right decision. He went on to warn me about doing an interview with her, because she was proving to be “very difficult.” At this point, a staff member, Janice, who is a middle-aged, non-Latinx black cis-woman, walked by us on her way out after completing her shift. She overheard us and interjected, “Oh yeah. Mercury...she’s ...uh...complicated” and gave Sam a knowing look. When I asked what they meant, Janice shrugged, and before leaving said maybe Mercury’s emotions were out of control because she was on hormones. Sam continued:

She has a hard time passing (as a woman). Even though trans girls are in the minority here at Rainbow, I have come to know a lot over the years. I know it must be hard for her, people keep calling you a man. But really, she is so difficult because she has bi-polar disorder. It's a lot, to be young and trans, but really, she's got to get her mental issues under control.

Though I grew suspicious about the narrative that was developing about Mercury, I was a little nervous about interviewing her. But I insisted and persisted. I told Sam that despite her being difficult, her perspective was still important, and that I needed as many interviews as possible for the research project. He conceded and called Mercury over from the community room down the hall.

I was surprised when a young woman, not much taller than I am (I am 4'11") demurely walked down the hall towards me, looking down at the floor the whole time. She was wearing a tight black and white checkered dress, a choker necklace, green high-top converse sneakers, and had a small afro. Mirroring her energy and confused by everything that just transpired, I nervously and quickly explained project to her and asked her if she wanted to do an interview. She very quietly said, as if to remain out of Sam's earshot, "I'm down. But I have to be honest. I am half Puerto Rican and half Black, but I really identify as Black. Is that okay?" I said absolutely, and we walked up to an empty lounge on the fourth floor.

Once we were alone, Mercury opened up and proved herself to be one of the most articulate and critically-thinking youth I have ever met. During our first interview she casually talked about the intricacies of colorism, non-binary transphobia, polyamory, and other topics that are typically the domain of theory or academia. She theorized with little explicit prompting from me, and using all the up-to-date theoretical language, in which some of my own academic colleagues lack competency.

Mercury moved to Chicago from rural Illinois a few months ago. She decided to start living as a girl when she was 16 years old. Before then, she didn't have the "language to

understand” that she was trans, until she learned a lot online and finally was able to say to herself, “Ok, I’m a girl!” She told a few of her close friends at school, and as a result, “lost them.” She had been diagnosed with generalized anxiety and bi-polar disorder, and after she was shunned by her friends, her anxiety increased, and she went into a “depressive state” that lasted over a year. Assuming that transitioning in high school would be “hell,” she dropped out. She didn’t reveal her gender identity to her family, and at the time of our interviews, they still did not know. She explained:

I didn’t come out or anything like that cuz I knew they wouldn’t accept me. Because I had some feminine traits, growing up my brothers who would call me homophobic slurs, and would treat me like the black sheep of the family. I know my mom isn’t particularly supportive, so I just kinda have chosen to separate myself from them.

Soon after leaving high school, Mercury took a Greyhound bus to the city.

She hasn’t talked to her family since. Once arriving in the city she couch-surfed, staying with other trans and non-binary people she met online, via twitter and role-playing video games specifically for queer folks. She recalled when the first trans woman she stayed with opened the door to her at 3:00 AM. Mercury saw her standing in the doorway and thought to herself, “People actually do this, I can actually do this, holy shit!”

After crashing with a number of friends she met online before moving she realized she needed a more permanent living situation. She searched online tirelessly for resources for homeless youth in the city. Because of severe budget cuts to social services across the state of Illinois, a number of shelters had been recently closed down, so many of the numbers Mercury found online were often no longer in service. Yet she kept trying. She reached different organizations, asked a lot of questions and followed-up until she learned about The Rainbow House. Mercury’s determination is impressive. Though she has only been in Chicago for three months, she volunteers with LGBTQ organizations in the city and does outreach work with a

program that helps homeless women with mental illness. Additionally, when the Wi-Fi at Rainbow House is strong enough, she writes educational blogs about being trans. She proudly said to me that since being in Chicago she has found three mentors from different LGBTQ organizations who are genderqueer women of color. She added, “I want to do resource advocacy cuz all the places I’ve gone to, people are like ‘You’ve done an incredible amount of self-advocacy, it’s amazing you’ve done this much. And it’s amazing that you are so resilient and hard-working.’” And indeed, when I met her mentors, they repeated these sentiments to me. But unfortunately, The Rainbow House was her only housing option, and the staff, all cisgender non-black individuals, did not view her in such a positive light. Despite her admirable qualities, the staff racially stereotyped her as unreasonable and aggressive, as I will show below.

The Effects of Racial Passing on Gender Passing and Vice Versa

Mercury complained that she was regularly misgendered by staff and other residents, most of whom were gay white men. They misgendered her by using the incorrect pronouns, either he/him/his or they/them/their, and thus disavowed her feminine identity. She referred to these as “micro-aggressions.” She was personally offended when they applauded her for “looking more feminine,” and said they were “glad she stopped that boy stuff.” While she recognized that they were trying to make her feel better by commenting on her changing appearance as she advanced in her transition, she felt that it implied that her gender was once male, and perhaps still is. She vented to me, “Staff should be educated, don’t misgender trans people. Just kinda basic education; don’t misgender people; don’t imply someone was a boy before.” When she was finally fed up with these “micro-aggressions,” she tried to engage a staff

member “about how there is gender assignment at birth, and sex organs aren’t gendered.” The discussion escalated into an “argument.”

Some acts of discursive violence were more overt. Once a drag-queen appeared in a commercial on the TV in the community room, and a cisgender gay male resident exclaimed, “Ew! What the?!” Mercury promptly called him out, but he insisted that he wasn’t talking about her, so she shouldn’t be so upset. She became more upset, and a staff member threatened to call the police on Mercury--not the other resident. Aware of how black people are disproportionately murdered by police officers, Mercury tweeted, “If I die tonight, it’s because the police were called on me.” She managed to calm down, and the staff member did not call the police.

Brilliantly entwining gender and race, and echoing the work of Collins (1999) cited in the previous section, Mercury suspected that she was frequently misgendered by staff and residents at The Rainbow House because she was black. Though she was also Latina, within the U.S. racial schema she wasn’t considered Latina, because Latinas are popularly misconceived as only light brown, and not black or darker skinned (Dzidzienyo & Oboler 2005). She pointed out that she didn’t have an Adam’s apple and her facial hair wasn’t thick, so her inability to pass a woman could not be blamed on these traits. She explained:

Blackness is often times tied to masculinity, even for black women, who have to go like even harder to present as feminine. And usually that means things like straightening their hair, embracing whiteness in order to become feminine, cuz femininity is associated with whiteness. As a black trans woman it’s hard to embrace your blackness and also, like, present as feminine. Like, my hair is not straightened or not treated or anything like that. People don’t see me as Latina. I have, like, black Puerto Rican hair...I feel like lighter trans Latina women get by a little bit more because they don’t have to go buy like weaves. They straighten their hair and appear whiter, because colorism also exists. Like lighter skin black trans women get treated a lot better than darker skinned black trans women.

Mercury addresses a number of issues in this short passage. Like Cleo, she describes colorism, or the form of discrimination in which trans people of color are treated differently based on the

shade of their skin. People with lighter skin are awarded more privileges and treated better than those with darker skin (Norwood 2014). Moreover, Mercury describes how colorism intersects with femininity, and how it is enforced upon and internalized by black and Latina trans women. She suspects that her blackness, and related inability to “pass” as a nonblack Latina, prevented her from easily “passing” as a woman, and this also made her more vulnerable to harassment when she was out in public. Most recently, she was verbally attacked on the bus. One person said, “You are man, you should act like it.” And then a second person joined in with, “People like you should die.” Since then, whenever she gets “looks,” which is often, she seriously fears for her safety.

Mercury’s reflections make vital contributions to existing understandings of the relationship between racial passing and gender passing in the U.S. Racial passing is a complicated process that has been foundational to American race relations and the development of America as a nation on the whole. Historians have described how racial passing first became a national concern after the abolition of slavery (Hobbs 2014; Kitch 2009; Sharfstein 2011). Historically in the U.S., anxieties about the color line and race’s legibility increased alongside insecurities about white superiority. While other ways to detect and measure race and racial inferiority were developed and instituted over time, such as the “one-drop rule,” appearance remained a primary way to distinguish racial difference in a racially insecure world, and still is today. For example, racial profiling, which puts people of color at significant risk of being murdered by police officers, persists across the country, and depends mostly on visual cues. According to Mercury’s descriptions, Mercury’s mother is a white-passing Puerto Rican, and her father is non-Latinx black, and despite the fact that she doesn’t know her father and grew up with her mother, she was unable to lay claim to her mother’s ethnicity, because of her own

appearance. Her racial reading as black and her inability to pass as Latina/brown and thus non-black despite her mother's racialization, has consequences for her safety and her gender identity.

"Gender passing" in the United States has also been fraught. Like the figure of the black person who passes as white and reveals the porousness of racial borders, the transgender person who passes as cisgender and defies gender boundaries is similarly viewed as deceptive, dishonest, and dangerous (Bettcher 2013; Halberstam 1998, 2005; Prosser 1998). Gender passing amongst transgender individuals of color is distinctively complex. In Mercury's case, her inability to pass as a woman exposed her to violence. This is not unique. Another trans Latina woman was simply walking down the street when a person driving by in a car threw a brick at the back of her head, causing her to need 14 stitches.

At the same time, transgender women are violently attacked precisely because of their ability *to successfully pass* as cisgender women. For example, in *Paris is Burning* (1990), the classic documentary film about Ballroom Culture in New York City, Venus Xtravaganza, who is of Puerto Rican and Italian American descent, is murdered at the age of 23. It is believed that she was murdered by a client who was surprised to find out that she was not cisgender. The client was so threatened by her and all she represented that he killed her.

Yet scholars have disagreed about the exact mechanisms behind Venus's death (e.g. Butler 1990, 1997; Davis 1999; Harper 1994; Prosser 2006) , revealing tensions about approaches to transgender between Queer Theory and Transgender Studies, as exemplified in the debate between Jay Prosser (representing Transgender Studies) and Judith Butler (representing Queer Theory) what is at stake for transgender women of color when it comes to passing, and the ways in which gender intersects with other facets of identity. In her article about queer theorists' appropriation of the transgender figure, literary scholar Jay Prosser (2006) argues that Judith

Butler (1990) applauds gender non-normative individuals who cannot easily pass as either man or woman, such as drag queens, for disrupting dominant understandings of gender. According to Prosser, Butler subsequently comes off as critical of transgender people who do pass, or want to pass, for reaffirming what she called “the normative framework of sexuality.” In fact, Butler (1993) used Venus as an example of someone who fails to be subversive by wanting to fulfill hegemonic gender and sex roles. In *Paris is Burning*, Venus expresses the desire find a man who will take care of her, live in a house in the suburbs, and become a “complete” woman via genital reconstructive surgery. She wants to pass, not just as a woman, but as a middle-class white woman. Ultimately, however, she did not pass, and this caused her death at the hands of a client. In her last moments, according to Butler, she was finally subversive. Moreover, Butler collapses gender and sexuality and views Venus’ murder as an act of homophobia, because in the moment in which her penis was revealed and she did not pass, she was read by her murderous client as a gay man. Prosser emphasizes that Venus’ murder was an act of *transphobia*, not *homophobia*.

Prosser writes (2006, 275):

That Butler figures Venus as subversive for the same reason that Butler claims she is killed, and considers indicative of hegemonic constraint the desires that, if realized might have kept Venus at least from this instance of violence, is not only strikingly ironic, it verges on critical perversity. Butler’s essay locates transgressive value in that which makes the subject’s real life most unsafe.

Furthermore, while Butler recognizes Venus’s mixed racial identity, she does not fully account for the racial dimensions of Venus’s personal desires, as a bi-racial transgender sex worker who seeks upwardly mobility, partly through white passing. Nor does she deeply consider her experiences as a sex worker, and the dangers to which she is exposed because of her race and occupation. Regardless, while Butler and Prosser raise a number of critical questions in their analyses, both of their interpretations of Venus’s gender passing, gender im-passing, and passing

away are based on representations of Venus in a documentary film. Centering transgender subjects, and Latinx subjects, who are in fact racially diverse, exposes new dimensions to the relationship between gender passing and racial passing in the US.

Within Latinx Studies, there is a new interest in the intricacies of racial passing, especially the case of intraLatinx passing (Aparicio 2016; Cárdenas 2016; Oliva Alvarado 2016). For example, Aparicio (2016) analyzes different ways that second-generation Latinxs of two or more national Latin American origins pass as “Mexican” or “Latina/o” in Mexican Chicago. She proposes that “horizontal hierarchies” amongst different Latinx (dis)identifications illuminate the struggles to belong in Latinx Chicago, as well as the relational negotiations among US Latinxs in general. This research, however, ignores black Latinxs and transgender Latinxs. Both occupy subject positions that complicate the passing process. Because of her skin color and hair texture, Mercury, is read by brown trans Latinxs as well as others in the queer community as black and not “Latina.” Therefore, Mercury self-identifies primarily as black, despite the fact that she was born to and grew up with a white-passing Puerto Rican mother. Her blackness masculinized her and thus affected her ability to “pass” as a woman. Recognizing how racial passing affects gender passing and vice versa complicates approaches to passing among Latinxs and further elucidates Latinxs’ struggles to belong in Latinx Chicago and relationally renegotiate their race in the US. Mercury’s experiences also demonstrate how gender is racialized.

Trans, Latina, Black, and Disabled

The inability to pass as non-black and non-trans can have dangerous consequences. Mercury was regularly threatened when out in public, especially when using public transportation. Because of the harassment she experienced on the bus due to her inability to “pass,” Mercury felt unsafe whenever she was in public and wanted to be prepared to protect

herself from physical assault. She was familiar with the rates at which trans women of color experience violence. She told me during that first interview that she had tried to secure pepper spray by herself but was unsuccessful. Therefore, she said she was going to ask the staff at the Rainbow House if they could get her pepper spray. A few days after the interview, I ran into Sam and Janice. Without any prompting on my behalf, or any mention of Mercury, they started complaining to me about how Mercury asked them for pepper spray. Sam gave me a look of disbelief, and Janice rolled her eyes. “Doesn’t she know that pepper spray is illegal in Illinois? Does she really think we would get her some? Doesn’t she realize we could get in so much trouble and lose our jobs? Imagine the scandal if we gave our residents pepper spray! I understand it is hard being trans, but really, you can’t always be on the offensive like that. Hurting people isn’t the answer.” They went on and on. I held my tongue at their interpretation of Mercury as unreasonable and violent.

To Mercury, having pepper spray was a way she could feel more secure against possible physical assault. Importantly, because of the grave intersection of transphobia and racism, black trans women are at significantly higher risk of physical violence, which too often ends in their murder. Mercury has a hard time passing as a woman, perhaps because she was black, and more specifically, dark-skinned. Therefore her “transgender-ness,” or her transgression of gender boundaries, was more obvious, putting her at even greater risk of violence from transphobic aggressors. Fully cognizant of this reality, she wanted pepper spray. To Sam and Janice, Mercury’s desire for pepper spray just confirmed that she was volatile. It is possible they viewed her as volatile, and potentially violent, because they stereotyped her according to popular misconceptions about trans women and people with disabilities. Recall Janice’s suggestion that her hormones made her unable to control her emotions, and Sam’s statement that, “really, she is

so difficult because she has bi-polar disorder.” Importantly, that her gender and mental disability are intersected by blackness no doubt made her seem even more unreasonable and aggressive. I could not help but worry that Sam and Janice were attempting to silence her because of her racial appearance that defied notions of trans passing and because she spoke her mind and openly critiqued acts of transphobia, ableism, racism, and colorism committed by staff and other residents at The Rainbow House.

Analysis of Mercury’s racialized gender can be further explored by engaging with disability studies. Scholars of Disability Studies who draw from Critical Race Feminist Theory (e.g. Erevelles and Minear 2010) look at the intersection of race, gender, class, *and* disability and show how disabled people of color are made invisible by the very social and state institutions that are supposed to serve and protect them. Likewise, psychiatrist and social? historian Jonathan Metzl (2009, ix) describes “how race gets written into the definition of mental illness” and “how historical concerns about racial protest reverberate through treatment institutions and subvert even well-intentioned efforts to diagnose people and help them.” Moreover, he argues that “Sometimes, the boundaries of sanity align closely with the perceived borders of the racial status quo.”

While Rainbow House is not a medical treatment institution, it is part of the social service apparatus that similarly aims to produce a certain kind of subject (Foucault 1977) that lives “independently,” or according to white cisgender middle-class ideals. Unlike the individuals described by Metzl (2009), Mercury is not a man (though she might be viewed as such via dominant understandings of gender). Yet, as Collins (1999) points out, black women are similarly viewed as “aggressive” a characteristic typically ascribed to the masculine. Moreover, I

argue that as a young black Latina trans woman, she poses a particular threat to the ideals espoused by the Rainbow House, and current social order.

The belief held by the staff at the Rainbow House that black people are aggressive, mixed with stereotypical notions that transgender people are crazy. Being transgender has long been considered pathological in the US. In fact, it was not until the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V), released in 2013, that transgender identity was no longer listed as a mental disorder. “Gender Identity Disorder” was changed to “Gender Dysphoria” to draw attention away from “identity” and toward the distress that *can* result from living with a non-normative gender identity. According to the new classification, being trans or genderqueer alone does not constitute a mental or psychological disorder. However, extreme distress related to one’s non-normative gender identity can lead to a stress, anxiety, and other conditions. Regardless of improvements in medical discourses which have implications for how the state views and manages gender non-normative individuals, transgender people still challenge social as well as moral norms across U.S. society, even within cisgender gay communities, and are often viewed as abnormal and unstable in everyday life. Furthermore, I argue that in light of recent national debates around “bathroom bills,” as discussed in the previous chapter, trans respectability politics, and the murder of trans women of color, the transgender woman has (re)emerged as a gendered and racialized scapegoat in the US.

In short, Mercury’s blackness and transness intersect to make her body appear abnormal, and her as irrational, aggressive, and potentially dangerous in the eyes of the staff at The Rainbow House. Additionally, Mercury is an example of the trans possibilities. She represents a younger generation of critically thinking trans and queer youth of color whose vocal opposition to acts of oppression are more visible to mainstream society than prior generations because of the

use of social media. For instance, three queer black women started the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement after unarmed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed, and his murderer was acquitted. The movement quickly gained momentum around the country via the social media hashtag #blacklivesmatter or #BLM. The hashtag was accompanied by the viral sharing of videos taken by bystanders, typically other people of color and allies, of unarmed black folks being brutally murdered by police officers.

It is possible, then, that Sam's and Janice's views of Mercury were influenced by historically rooted fears of disorderly black and trans folks, and increasing national anxieties about revolting youth of color in the face the Black Lives Matter movement. They perhaps unintentionally sought to silence Mercury by attributing her "difficult attitude" to her gender identity and psychiatric disability, instead of accepting her legitimate critiques which threaten them personally, the disciplining apparatus for which they work, and the larger tenets of American society. Thus, transphobia, ableism, and racism interrelate in particular ways in the current political moment in the US, affecting how trans women of color are viewed and treated, even by those who are supposed to help them.

The Violent Black Male Client

As discussed throughout this dissertation, intertwined cartographies of race and gender dehumanize trans Latina sex workers and therefore justify the multiple violences that are regularly committed against them. However, trans Latinas are not just victims of harmful cartographies, but also active participants in them, even in ways that may be harmful to others. In this chapter, I have argued that Latinxs are haunted by blackness, and that Latinxs who are not read as black (and even some of those who are) attempt to distance themselves from blackness. Because blackness is perceived as masculine, trans women have greater reason to distance themselves

from blackness. In the final section of this chapter, I demonstrate how trans Latina women, including those read as black, distance themselves from blackness by critiquing black cisgender male clients. Because they critique American systems of racism while at the same time engaging in racism against others, I argue that my interlocutors' relationship to race and racism in the United States is complex, contradictory, and ambivalent.

One of my interview questions was "What do you to stay safe when doing sex work?" During an interview I conducted early in the project, a trans woman responded, "Well, I don't take black clients." A little taken aback, I paused. And in fact, this racist statement and the ease at which she made it was one of the most difficult moments for me of the research. Nonetheless, I frequently heard it, by Latina sex workers of all complexions, from black to light brown. The figure of the "Violent Black Cis Male Client" also emerged in response to another related question: "Have you ever experienced violence when doing sex work?" While the majority of interlocutors replied with "yes," the three who proudly answered "no" said they avoided violence precisely because they do not take black clients. This declaration requires interrogation.

Specifically, while it is vital that we honor the voices and perceptions of trans women of color, none of the interlocutors themselves reported experiencing violence from black clients. I take their accounts of violence seriously, especially violence encountered during sexual labor. However, it is notable that none of them recalled stories of being abused by black men, but rather based their claim in "hearing it from friends" who were viciously attacked by black men. Hence, I argue that the "Violent Black Cis Male Client" is a figure that embodies national representations of black cis men as inherently violent and anti-Black and colorist attitudes within Latinx communities. Indeed, despite sensationalist accounts of prostitution that suggest otherwise, sexual economies of labor, and the discourses that circulate within them, are not

divorced from their larger cultural contexts. Trans Latina sexual economies of labor are no exception.

Powerful ideas that black men are violent, especially sexually violent, have long existed in the American imagination. Black sexual pathology justified slavery, and fear of slave rebellion was often tied to fear of sexually out-of-control black men who would rape innocent white women if given the smallest opportunity. After slavery ended, anxieties about sexually violent Black men only sky-rocketed, folding into fears about sexual liaisons between black men and white women. Such deep unease led to countless lynchings of Black men, which persisted throughout the 1900s (Davis 1981; McGruder 2010; Carby 1985). These images of fearful black men have endured and can be seen in the more recent figure of “thug,” who endangers society, and thus white supremacy, by killing, stealing, and raping. In response to Black Lives Matter and more visible black organizing, the image of the “thug” is even more frequently circulated via various types of media, including media intended to be fictional, such as movies, and media parading as factual, such as the news. The trope has real consequences. For example, as legal scholar Michelle Alexander argues, black men are disproportionately criminalized, incarcerated, and murdered, exactly because of their race and gender and what they represent (Alexander 2012). While the trope of black male predator is durable, it also takes on new meanings and novel threats in different cultural and sub-cultural contexts (McCune et al 2010).

Anti-blackness in the Latinx community is influenced by these ideas, and others. Some scholars (Almaguer 2012; Frank et al 2010; Marrow 2011) have suggested that antagonisms between blacks and Latinxs have arisen from the capitalist system wherein black and Latinx laborers are made to believe that they are competing with each other in the worsening economy for the few available jobs. In fact, similar tensions exist among black and brown sex workers,

especially on “the stroll”—the most competitive sex work environment where workers outnumber clients who are just quickly moving through. Latinas often complain that black women on the stroll try to appear Latina in order to attract clients by shouting Spanish phrases, such as “*Hola Papi*,” to potential customers passing by.

Given that Chicago is one of the most racially segregated cities in the US, the black/brown tensions that fester in the city work their way into the trans community. While this might be evident in my research, it masks the generative coalitions that exist between Latinxs and African-Americans (Oboler & Dzidzienyo 2005). Moreover, while Chicago does not have as large of a population of Afro-Latinxs to trouble divisions between blacks and Latinxs like cities on the east coast, there are indeed black Latinxs in Chicago and in its’ trans Latina community. Even so, racial tensions still exist, and they are sexualized. It is also important to note that because of internalized racism and racial self-hatred, it is possible for black Latinas to hold anti-black sentiments which stereotype blacks and suggest that black men are violent. In short, racialized and sexualized imageries, while persistent, are experienced and used in complex ways. Sex working trans Latinas, even those who were black, evoked racist/racialized and sexualized images of black men to bolster their own femininity.

Veronica is a 34-year-old Cuban transwoman. She is tall and skinny—yet curvy--and has long, straightened, honey-blond hair that hangs around her waist in loose layers. Her make-up and wardrobe are always stunning. Today she is wearing a see-through black lace shirt, skin-tight white pants, and strappy black stilettos. She is loud, opinionated, and confident. While she is very light-skinned and self-identifies as a white Latina, because of her facial features, particularly her nose, she is sometimes read by others as black. Yet, perhaps because she is a respected “high-class escort,” her ambiguous racial identity is not something that is openly talked

about, neither by her nor other women in the community. The only time it is brought up is as an insult from her “haters,” in this case other trans sex workers of color, whom she easily dismisses as “jealous.” When I ask her if she had ever experienced violence when doing sex work, she responds:

Never! It’s interesting. Because I chose my clients wisely. Um, I chose very wisely. I never go for any black guy. Because every girl that I know who has been beaten up before, the client is black. I never go for a black guy, never. It has nothing to do with racism, it’s just *every* girl that’s ever been raped or anything, it’s *always* always the black or Spanish guy. If you call me like “Hey ma, what up boo, you got plans?” I will hang up on you immediately. Most of my clients, 90% of them, are older white males. So I chose my clients very wisely, um, and I don’t do any drugs, um, I don’t drink with clients, and as soon as he starts talking about sex on the phone I hang up on them. So I think all of these girls, as soon as they hear 100-200 bucks they don’t care who’s talking, they don’t care what the person wants to do. But I’ve never experienced a rape or doing something I don’t want to do. I’ve been very blessed that way, that I’ve never had to do anything I don’t wanna do. If anything, I’ve kicked a few out cuz I’m like, “I’m not gonna do that, get out, I’m paid already.” It’s my house, it’s my body, it’s my rules, if you don’t like the rules, ya know, I’m not gonna have unprotected sex or oral or anal or anything. I don’t kiss anyone. I don’t have any contact with your saliva, so I’m very careful with that. Um and I tell them as soon as they walk in the door. They get naked and I know they’re not a cop.

There is a lot to unpack in her response. First, like many others, says that while *she’s* never been assailed by black client, “every girl” she ever “heard” of being assaulted has. This reflects the widespread belief reinforced by racist media portrayals that black cis men are violent predators. Moreover, because Veronica herself is sometimes read as black, she may be trying to distant herself from blackness and its negative associations. Black clients were also talked about in ways that reproduce other stereotypes about black people, and black men in particular. For example when I asked Brittini if she had experienced violence when doing sex work, like Veronica she said “no,” but recounted the time her friends suffered from violence at the hands of their clients:

That’s happened to my girls where they got, they both got, um, three African American guys came to the room and stold all their stuff, um, they raped them. They raped them, and, and, and, it was just really bad, really bad. And they were working in other cities, so,

uh, that's one, uh, story I heard about that my two of my girlfriends got raped. And robbed. And then everything, they didn't have none of their computers, none of their cellphones so like basically they were stranded also, it was very very, um, bad for them. Yea.

Brittini's story about her friends suggests that in addition to be physically and sexually violent, black men steal. Related to this popular misconception, Dora suggests that black clients try to take advantage of sex workers by getting more than what they paid for. She says:

Ugh. I think that that clientele base really made me hate sex work. So it's like they want more for less. Ugh, Jesus. Them fools want you to jump from chandeliers and land on the dick, they just want you to do circus stunts. They want you to perform acrobatic acts! Without paying for all that. No thank you.

What is important about racialized constructions of dangerous clients is not only that they mirror longstanding racist tropes about black men in the United States, but also how women strategically deploy them to create and maintain race and class structures within sexual economies of labor. For example, to Veronica, the decision to not take black clients is not simply a way to ensure her safety but importantly to maintain boundaries between herself and her clients and blackness more generally. She discusses her refusal to sell sexual services to black men alongside not drinking and doing drugs with clients, not kissing clients, and not having unprotected sex with clients. By presenting these activities as individual choices she suggests that sex workers who do not choose to act as cautiously are perhaps responsible for the violence committed against them. She repeats that she chooses her client "very wisely" and says, "So I think all of these girls, as soon as they hear 100-200 bucks they don't care who's talking..."

Why might Veronica wish to distinguish herself from other sex workers who would seemingly do anything for \$200? Veronica considers herself a "high class escort." Among the different types of sex work, escorts are the highest paid and least stigmatized. Therefore, when she distinguishes herself from girls who would risk their safety for \$200, she is emphasizing that

as a high-class escort she does not have to. Moreover, she implies that as a high-class escort she is responsible, unlike street workers--the most stigmatized type of sexual laborer. In addition to responsibility, she highlights something else that differentiates high class sex workers from low class sex workers: control and choice. She exclaims with attitude, "It's my house, it's my body, it's my rules" and declares that she makes clients undress at the door, to make sure that are not police officers. By emphasizing her ability to be well-off, responsible, and in control, Veronica may also be attempting to "whiten" herself and distance herself from behaviors that are not only "lower-class" but also stereotypically black.

Veronica alludes to a racial hierarchy among clients that intersects with the malleable race and class hierarchies amid sex workers. Like the other two "high class escorts" who participated in the project, most of her clients are "older white males." In the intersecting system of racialized hierarchies of sex worker and client, the higher class a sex worker, the whiter (and read: wealthier) their clientele. Moriah, another high-class escort, says, "I don't service black people. I don't know why, I've had some. Probably, my whole life? Probably ten. The ones that are more like safe to me is just the white people. I don't know why. And maybe, it's just, ya know, something, I don't wanna be racist or whatever, but it's just what I like." In her neoliberal, post-race ideology, she explicitly claims that is *not* because she is racist, but a personal preference, based on what she's heard about her friends' experiences. Within the intersecting hierarchies, high class sex workers see mostly older white clients, and lower-class sex workers who work on the street, like Dora, cannot afford to be picky, and are thus forced to see men of color, and black men in particular. While the prototypical dangerous client is clearly a black man, Veronica quickly adds Latino/ brown men into the mix when she asserts that, "it's always always the black *or Spanish guy*" who assaults sex workers. According to this racial structure

outlined by her and others, and drawing from racialized understandings of masculinity in the US in general, Latino/brown men are not nearly as safe as white men, but slightly safer than black men. Veronica is also emphasizing that she is a “high-class escort” who only sees white male clients.

Brittini brings up another racialized dimension of the ways in which worker-clients relations are talked about in trans Latina sexual economies. Before sharing the example presented above of her friends who were raped and robbed, she says,

Usually African-American men will try and do something to a Latina, actually a Latina, because if they do it to an African American woman, the African American transgender woman will try and fight them, but as a, as a, Latina, uh, they would be scared and just do whatever the they guy tells them to do and, and, and for them, um, for them to not get killed or whatever.

Reiterating the racialized stereotypes about trans women discussed earlier in this chapter, Brittini not only illustrates how black cis male clients are viewed as innately violent, but also how black trans women are seen as hypermasculine and strong and Latinas trans women are perceived as weak, feminine, and submissive. Gendered and racialized images of clients and sex workers co-exist, interact with, and co-construct one another in sexual economies. And trans Latina women strategically deploy them to distance themselves from blackness and masculinity and thus bolster their identity as light skinned Latinas who are viewed as more feminine than darker skinned counterparts.

Conclusion

While powerful ideologies and discourses about race/gender circumscribe trans Latinas’ lives in serious and often potentially lethal ways (as will be discussed in depth in the next chapter), the women use, resist, and rework ideas about race/gender in complex and surprising ways. They sometimes did so in ways that further codify a racialized gender system in which

blackness is masculine and dangerous. Black Latina trans women had to contend with anti-black beliefs that disavowed their Latina identity, made them appear more masculine and thus threatened their feminine identity, and exposed them to both racist and transphobic violence. Yet, sex working trans Latinas, even those who were read as black, also evoked racist/racialized and sexualized images of black men to bolster their own femininity. Ethnographically examining these processes provides insights into how gender is racialized, how race affects and is refracted through transgender subjectivity, how Latinxs navigate everyday racialization, and how racialization plays out in urban America's sexual economies of labor. While it is tempting to victimize transgender Latinas whose lives are circumscribed by various systems of oppression, they too can engage in oppressive behaviors against others. They are racial and sexual *fantasias*, but even *fantasias* may be haunted by racism, in this case, anti-blackness.

Chapter 5: Money, Kin & Ambivalence

Leticia is an 18-year-old transgender Puerto Rican woman who lives on the North West Side of Chicago in Humboldt Park, the heart of “Puerto Rican Chicago.” After she left school a year ago in order to escape relentless bullying because of her transgender identity, she applied for countless jobs, most of which were in the service sector. If she was lucky enough to get an interview, she would not be offered a job, because of her appearance as a transgender woman, or because her legal documents did not reflect the name she uses and gender with which she identifies. She was finally hired at a fast food restaurant. But coworkers and customers constantly said transphobic and racist things to her, including derogatory terms like “tranny” or “she-male.” Her non-Latinx co-workers made fun of her accent, and her boss, a non-Latinx white cisgender man, forbade her and other Latinx employees from speaking Spanish to each other while working. Unable to bear the harassment any longer, she quit after only a few weeks.

Leticia’s experiences are not unique; they are representative of the experiences of virtually all of the trans Latina women I knew. I met Leticia shortly after she quit her job at the fast food restaurant. She was living with Dora, a 38-year-old Puerto Rican trans woman, as she had been kicked out of her biological family’s home when she left school a month earlier. Dora would soon become her “transmother.” The two were lounging on the mattress in the middle of the room that functioned as both a bedroom and living room in Dora’s small studio apartment. Leticia was complaining about her experiences at the restaurant. The TV was blasting in the background, as it was most of the day. A telenovela was on. Dora forcefully took the remote control and lowered the volume. I was thankful for some quiet but slightly nervous as the tone in the room suddenly became serious. Dora turned to Leticia and lovingly, yet sternly, said “You have two options in life: you either suck dick or be beautiful to make money.” The first refers to

sex work that involves physical contact, and the second refers to webcam work, a type of sexual labor that does not require bodily interaction. Leticia would go on to do both. While she much preferred webcam work, she was forced to have physical contact with clients when the money gained from webcam work was not enough to pay all of her bills. She explained to me in a matter of fact, and also almost proud, way, “When you can’t get what you need in the house, you go out into the streets.”

Leticia’s story demonstrates the way that trans Latinas in Chicago face a life bounded by their “transgressive” gender and sexual identity. Their gender and race foreclose many of the educational and labor opportunities that white cis-gender individuals may access and places them instead in economies of fetishized beauty and sexual labor. These structural constraints have been addressed in the literature (e.g. Currah & Spade 2008; Gehi & Arkles 2007; Graham 2014; Irving 2008; Whittle et al 2007). Here I want to shift focus the barriers that prevent trans women from earning money legally to the money that trans women do earn. Of course, money is a pre-requisite for survival for trans Latinas as much as anyone else, but it is also far more than this.

Scholars (Zelizer 2005; Brennan 2004) have reminded us of the importance of interrogating assumptions about the relationship between sex work and money, and the ways sex workers view and use money earned from their labor. Anthropologists have demonstrated that an ethnographic lens is particularly helpful for challenging reductionist understandings of sex workers and revealing the complexities of their lives (Brennan 2004; Cabezas 2011, Shah 2014 and others). Amongst sex workers in the U.S., there are certain groups of individuals about which it may be even more difficult to trouble stereotypical notions, especially regarding the role of money in their lives, identities, and subjectivities. There are particularly rigid assumptions about the meanings of money among transgender sex workers, and particularly transgender sex

workers of color. Based on my research, I argue that more examinations are needed that extend beyond a quick connection between the participation in sexual economies of labor and the need for money to survive, especially for trans people of color. An analysis of money in people's lives that ends there runs the risk of reifying transgender sex workers of color. Moreover, such linear assumptions may contribute to the victimizing transgender people of color and sex workers in the US, which can have dangerous consequences (Aizura 2012; Lamble 2013; Irving 2012).

Money, accessed through sexual labor, represents a productive capacity in the lives of women for both the self and their relation to others. In the first four chapters I describe the multiple violences—including historical, economic, physical, emotional, discursive, racial—that trans Latinas endure. In this chapter and the next, I turn to the instances of potentiality that the labor of sex working trans Latina women allows. An ethnographic examination of trans Latina sex workers' lives reveals that money enables a number of potentialities: the creation and affirmation of the gendered self, and the development and nourishment of various forms of kinship and mutual care. I focus on how money from sex work is used to produce and empower the self, and I explain the need and use of money to transition. Then, I examine how trans Latina sex workers find personal empowerment and confidence from earning money through sex work, even when they are unhappy with sex work and other parts of their lives. I also draw attention to the relationship between money and kinship. Drawing from Latinx studies (Acosta 2013; Cantú 2009; Decena 2011), I analyze the roles of money to both create queer kinship and maintain “biological” kin ties, locally and transnationally, across the US border in Latin American countries. Yet, I center some specific challenges of being transgender, as trans Latina strategically manipulate transnational space between themselves and kin to be themselves and love their kin. Throughout this chapter, I argue that money is a useful unit of analysis for

understanding how trans Latina women creatively produce the self and various types of kinship formations.

Therefore, in addition to challenging assumptions about sex workers, and the relations between money and sex work, this approach to money deepens understandings of the complex social worlds of sex workers, transgender women, and Latinxs. Using money as an analytic entry point also reveals a profound ambivalence amongst sex working trans Latinas, both in their views of their participation in sexual labor, and in how their relationship with biological kin may be characterized.

Financing Gender and Producing the Self

According to my interviews, after financing basic needs such as food and housing, the third most common expense that income gained from sex work includes medical and cosmetic intervention to align women's appearances with their true gender identity. Such interventions can include surgical procedures that feminize the face, breasts, hips, and buttocks, as well as hormone therapy and the use of hair extensions, and permanent and semi-permanent face and body hair removal. Indeed, all of the aforementioned interventions are quite costly. The average cost of just breast implants, one of the first procedures many of the women desire is almost \$4,000. Moreover, the women's pursuit of gender via bodily modification is a deeply racialized process, as ideas about race and gender are interrelated and co-constructed (Stoler 2002; Wade 2009). They invest in beauty practices to emphasize their "Latina-ness," such as injecting silicon into the hips, getting butt implants, and wearing red lipstick. Illustrating the colorism that exists within Latinx communities around notions are gender, beauty, and attractiveness, many simultaneously sought to make themselves appear more white. With the exception of one 18-year-old proud Afro-Puerto Rican woman, all of the interlocutors straightened their hair, for

example. And a number had rhinoplasties, to make their noses look what they considered more Anglo, or less Black and/or less indigenous. Notably, the traits that they personally found attractive also made them more desirable to clients and thus more successful in sexual economies of labor.

While explaining the prevalence of sex work in the trans Latina community and its connection to “plastic” surgery and the pressure to transition, one collaborator said, “What would you do if you felt trapped in a cage? What would you do to feel alive? Work at McDonalds and make minimum wage and wait 20 years to transition...or maybe even wait forever?” Her quote demonstrates that we can’t understand sex work if we don’t also account for the role of *money*, specifically, in aligning one’s physical body and gender. Sex work, as the source of this life-giving money, can be viewed as a courageous and self-affirming sacrifice that allows transgender women to more quickly transition and live as their true identities. Notably, however, not all transgender people feel the need to change their bodies, and those who do may not understand such changes via the concept of “transition.” Yet for those who do, they find themselves with expenses that cisgender individuals do not have to worry about in order to feel comfortable in their own bodies. In fact, dissatisfaction with one’s body and appearance has been linked with diminished mental health and quality of life (e.g Ainsworth & Spiegel 2010).

In an early interview with Katalina, a 28-year-old Puerto Rican, after a few basic demographic questions, she randomly interjected with, “I just feel like I don’t love myself” and then burst into tears. I was a little caught off-guard, and couldn’t help but shed a few tears too. But once I quickly collected myself and asked her why she felt this way, she couldn’t quite articulate reasons. No doubt, her lack of self-love is a complicated issue that was influenced by systemic transphobia and the countless acts of violence—both structural and intimate--

committed against her throughout her life. A few weeks later, though, when I was waiting for a meeting at Community Healing Initiative (CHI)—an HIV and AIDS organization in Humboldt Park—to begin, Katalina excitedly rushed toward the door to CHI once she saw me on the other side. Even from inside the building I could see that she was glowing. Before she completely crossed the threshold, she exclaimed, “I got my boobs! I feel like I love myself now!” She had just returned from Florida where she got DD sized breast implants via a doctor who occasionally travels from Mexico to Florida to provide surgeries to transgender women at discounted prices. She paid the entire bill with money solely earned from sex work.

The use of money received from sexual labor to finance trans women’s transition challenges the popular assumption that when one is accepting cash for sexual services they are “selling their bodies” and thus “selling their selves” (Barry 1995; Dworkin 1992; MacKinnon 1991; Pateman 1988). Quite the contrary, trans Latinas use money from sex work to honor and build the body and thus produce their true selves.

Confidence-Boosting Capabilities of Money and Ambivalent Attitudes towards Sex Work

Dora was complaining to me about sex work. She said that it caused her to have an unhealthy relationship with sex and men, and sometimes brought her to “a dark place.” She was tired of clients’ disrespect, undercompensation, and increasingly unrealistic expectations. With her characteristic *Boricua* (or, Puerto Rican) “attitude,” she elaborated, “Clients nowadays want you to jump towards the ceiling, do a backflip around the chandelier, and then land on the dick. Andddd THEN they have the nerve to ask for a discount!” She shook her head in exasperation. After thinking to herself for a moment she said to me “I’m done with sex work. Today I am done.”

Dora suffers from depression and was also experiencing a significant amount of stress in other aspects of her life. She recently started working at an organization that serve the LGBTQ community. Despite the agency's official mission to help all members of the LGBTQ community, Dora was asked by a queer cisgender female co-worker not to use the woman's bathroom when other people were in it. This is a representative example of how trans individuals are marginalized within the LGBTQ community and its cis-centric neoliberal organizing efforts (Spade 2011). The day she told me she would quit sex work, we met up during her short lunch break at the organization, and I could see by the way she anxiously bit her nails, rapidly tapped her feet, and continuously looked around the space that it was difficult for her to be there. At that time, she was having conflicts with two of her closest trans Latina friends.

I was surprised when I saw her the next day and she was in a good mood. With a huge smile on her face, she explained that one of her clients last night was extra generous and paid her way more money than she was expecting. She said to me, "I love sex work." Shortly after we parted ways she posted a picture of a large wad of cash on Facebook and wrote below the image: "I love my life."

A few months later, Katalina was venting to me. She said she was unhappy with her life and wanted to quit sex work. The labor was too physically and emotionally demanding, and the majority of the men were "gross," she lamented. She wanted to "make something of herself" and planned to start applying for jobs later in the week. That night, however, she was able to see a high-paying client that she had not worked with in a while, and the next morning she too posted a picture to Facebook of a number of \$100 bills fanned out across her bed. The caption was "Love my job." When I saw her next, she said she was feeling better about herself and her situation. She no longer intended to apply for legal jobs.

There are many reasons why both Dora and Katalina decided to post pictures of their earnings on Facebook. One reason is in rivalry with other sex workers with whom they are Facebook friends, especially for Dora who, at the time, was arguing with her two closest trans Latina friends who are also sex workers. Indeed, there is a lot of competition between Chicago's trans Latina sex workers. However, I would also like to argue that they felt genuinely empowered by the money they earned. In this way they are like drug-dealers and some adherents to hip hop culture, who, precisely because they are excluded from formal economies of labor, find income and even respect and prestige in informal economies of labor (Bourgois 1996). In the face of their exclusion from legal means of economic prosperity, they rebelliously celebrate their financial success (in underground economies) via displays of their wealth, or acts of "conspicuous consumption" (Bourdieu 1984; Trigg 2001). Such conspicuous displays of money attest to its symbolic power, and its value beyond the purely economic (Graeber 2001). Money, or importantly the public representation of it such as on Facebook, can also offer temporary feelings of enfranchisement and validation in an otherwise exclusionary system. It is a potent symbol that unites different forms of value which have meaning to the individual and their larger social worlds.

Leticia once said to me that in spite of the disgust she feels when having sex with clients whom she finds unattractive (older men with "big wrinkly balls," as she once described), nothing feels better than getting paid. Getting paid well affirms that one is a good sex worker and female, and moreover it plays into a prestige hierarchy among those engaged in sexual labor. Large amounts of cash distinguish a person from sex workers who are paid less, or, to be more specific, street sex workers. The evaluative meanings projected onto the figure of the street sex worker goes beyond a simple class differentiation for trans women. Trans street sex workers are often

associated with their appearance. And their appearances are euphemistically described with phrases such as “rough around the edges.” They are imagined to be more masculine looking because they are poorer and cannot afford the interventions that feminize one’s appearance. The figure of the street worker is also racialized as black or of a darker complexion. Therefore, they do not “pass” (as cisgender women) and are thus less desirable and even less womanly in the gendered hierarchy where cisgender woman and passing trans women are at the top and trans women who do not pass or seek to pass and thus reject the gender binary completely at all are at the bottom. When Dora and Katalina received larger amounts of cash for their sexual labor, they were not only affirmed as good sex workers and women, but also higher-class sex workers, and attractive trans women, or trans women who could more easily gender “pass.” For these reasons, money earned from sex work can boost their confidence and aid in improving their own perceptions of themselves as women. Considering the pressures of being a transgender woman troubles the belief that when a person receives money for providing sexual services they are utterly degraded (Barry 1995; Dworkin 1992; MacKinnon 1991; Pateman 1988).

Women’s pride in themselves for earning their own money from sexual labor was evidenced in other ways, too. During one of my initial interviews, the woman attempted to give me an overview of trans Latina sexual economies of labor in the city, and made sure I knew that trans women sex workers, unlike cisgender women sex workers, “don’t have pimps.” She explained, “I am very proud to say that in my almost sixty years of living I have never met a trans girl with a pimp. We don’t have pimps. Give someone else the money that WE worked for!? Trans girls aren’t that stupid.” I would in fact hear a number of my trans women proudly state that trans girls didn’t have pimps. And indeed, I never met a trans sex worker that had one. Of course, some had boyfriends who expected different levels of financial support, but none had

pimps who oversaw them or demanded a certain percentage of their earnings. This popular idea that trans sexual laborers don't have pimps differentiates trans sex workers from cisgender women sex workers, in a way that suggest that trans sex worker are "smarter," more independent, and more entrepreneurial than cis-females, reproducing patriarchal ideas about female subordination.¹¹

The differentiation from cisgender women workers and the public disassociation with cisgender male pimps also demonstrates the pride they feel when securing their own money from sex work. To be sure, Dora and Leticia did not only feel proud when receiving compensation for sexual labor. There were times when Dora and Leticia did indeed feel degraded for selling sexual services, and the objectification and fetishization of trans women, and especially trans Latina women and other women of color, in sexual economies of labor is not to be taken lightly. Yet in addition to feeling degraded they also felt a number of other complex and even contradictory emotions, such as pride. Successfully securing money in a capitalist society that sees you as a threat to its very foundation and as a consequence seeks to completely exclude and eliminate you can be bring a person a sense of dignity. Scholarly assumption that trans sex workers only feel shame and worthlessness about their work, instead of the immense spectrum of complex human emotions, may contribute to their dehumanization and thus justify violence against them. Furthermore, focusing on individuals' negative emotional responses to specific instances of degradation within sexual economies conveniently draws attention away larger political, economic, and social structures that dehumanize trans sex workers, and the other socially acceptable sources of abuse, such as police officers. It also presents sexual economies of labor as

¹¹ Trans sex workers and cisgender sex workers were also differentiated by drug use. Trans women claimed that cisgender sex workers are more likely to do sex work to support drug addictions. Trans women, on the other hand, viewed their sex working solely as the result of less employment options. This interestingly alleviates trans sex workers from responsibility and blame for selling sexual services.

the only spaces where widespread gendered violence occurs, ignoring the larger patterns of gendered and racial violence that shape the lives of trans Latina sex workers more broadly. Regardless, their views towards sex work are marked by a profound ambivalence, which indicates a deep awareness of all of the aforementioned factors.

Money and Trans Kinship

Sex work and transitioning are often done with the help of a “transmother.” Transmothers provide emotional care and support, and oftentimes food and shelter for their daughters. They teach their daughters how to be trans women, and offer advice about make-up, hormones, silicon injections, and surgeries. They also teach them how to get started in the sex trade. If they have already begun doing sex work, they encourage safer sex practices and share tips for getting more clients. Many women found their transmothers in LGBT clubs, such as *La Hueca*, the second oldest LGBT club in the U.S.. Situated in Little Village, or *La Villita*, which is a part of Mexican Chicago, *La Hueca* was founded by trans Latina women, the majority involved in sexual labor, who sold tamales and CDs on the streets to open the club. The club is known for its famous “drag” performances and the selling of sexual services by trans women just outside of the club. Some women found their “transmothers” on the “stroll,” and several, including Leticia, found them while living on the streets after being kicked out of their parent’s homes.

I also witnessed younger girls actively seek out and court potential transmothers. For example, Katalina hung out on Division Street in Humboldt Park, where 36 year old Jesenia volunteered passing out condoms to other sex workers and drug users in the large park after which the neighborhood is named. Katalina heard from others that Jesenia was a transmother to many in the trans Latina sex working community. Katalina lacked stable parental figures in her life since she was about 18 years old, when her biological parents violently kicked her out of her

home because of her gender nonconformity. After a few months of hanging out and chatting with Jesenia, Katalina gave her a card on mother's day. The front of the card read, "Isn't it amazing how one little person can change your whole world?" The inside said, "Celebrating you on your 1st Mother's Day!" Katalina then wrote her own message on in the inside, "I love and enjoy being around you. I want to better my life because one day I wanna be like you." Jesenia accepted the card and from then on started treating Katalina like her daughter.

Much literature on "queer kinship" (e.g Butler 2002; Carrington 1999; Hicks 2005; Hull 2006; Levine 2008; Sanger 2010; Sullivan 2004) and even trans kinship more specifically (Robson 2006; Sanger 2010) focuses on same-sex couples and the contested issue of legal marriage. Therefore exploring other types of intimate and familial relationships beyond the two-person partnership (Hines 2007; Moore 2011; Pidduck 2009; Weston 1991) remains a fertile endeavor. More examinations are needed that also take race and processes of racialization into account (notable works that do include Bailey 2013; Eng 2010). While Bailey (2013) recognizes how "queer cultural labor," or "kin work" upholds the social configuration of physical and symbolic homes amongst members of the black LGBTQ community in Detroit, money as a way to solidify kin connections is thus far underexplored in the literature on queer kinship. Amongst ethnographies of transgender and/or gender variant people (Kulick 1998; Ochoa 2014; Prieur 1998; Reddy 2005; Sinnot 2004) involved in sexual economies of labor, only a few acknowledge the roles and uses of money to create and foster kin relationships (Kulick 1998; Reddy 2005). Kulick (1998), for example, describes how *travestis* in Brazil financially support their boyfriends, who are central figures in their lives, but again he does not consider other types of relationships.

Being attentive to the use of money by trans Latina women shows that while it may defy neoliberal individualist logic, it is still productive in a number of different ways, including personally, financially, and socially. Trans Latina sex workers borrow, lend, and share the limited amount of money that does exist within their social networks. They often do so to finance basic needs, such as food, to guarantee their survival. However, the movement of money may sometimes seem nonsensical to outsiders. For instance, women would sometimes spend what little bit of money they had on their appearance as opposed to food. They did this because their appearance was vital to their gender identity as women and their occupations as sex workers. The exchange of money within social networks also reveals an internal logic different from that espoused by more formalized sectors of the economy.

The women were constantly lending each other money as a form of economic and symbolic support for one another. Money solidified kin connections across state-lines too, exemplifying the expansiveness and connectedness of the trans Latina network. Those who had recently arrived in Illinois from other locations in the US had transmothers in their previous states of residence who still wired them money when they could. Many women moved around the country to avoid particularly violent police officers, immigration officers, and clients. Yet their transmothers kept tabs on them and still offered economic support from afar. For example, 18-year-old Lexia had moved to Chicago from North Carolina to escape an abusive boyfriend. She chose Chicago because she had done extensive online research and discovered that it has a program that offers free housing to LGBTQ youth. She came, by herself, via a number of buses. She was accepted into the program and thus received free housing, but the program did not cover the rest of her basic living expenses. When we first met she hadn't started doing sex work yet. Though she was only 18 and did not complete high school, she had a familiarity and comfort

with concepts such as “colorism,” “micro aggression,” and “polyamory,” that some of my own academic colleagues lacked. She was candid and we hit it off immediately. I asked her how she was getting by. She told me her transmother was wiring her money. I assumed her transmother was in North Carolina, but she was in Seattle. And in fact, they have never met in person. They met online.¹²

While some pairs of transmothers and transdaughters kept in regular contact, many admitted that they did not talk to each other as much as they would like, because of their busy and sometimes unpredictable lifestyles. Mothers, however, expected that they would hear from their daughters when they needed money. They often complained that the sex market was not as good as it was when they were younger, and trans sex workers were getting paid less for services that used to cost more. Hence, the increased need to borrow money from one’s trans kin network. After the daughter reached out for money, the two would catch up and the mother would be relieved that her daughter was okay. Money, then, was a way to connect to them despite physical distance. It is a useful unit of analysis to understand trans Latinas’ lives, queer kinship formations, and sexual economies of labor.

The lending of money between Dora and Jesenia demonstrates how the movement of cash between trans Latina women defies basic capitalist logic and instead upholds other personal and social priorities. Dora owed Jesenia \$20. Dora got paid and Jesenia knew so. Dora offered to pay Jesenia back but Jesenia refused to accept it just yet. Jesenia, however, needed the money; she in fact did not even have the bus fare to get home. She then asked me, someone without the financial struggles of a trans sex worker, to borrow \$11. I suspect that Jesenia wanted to keep

¹² This speaks to generational changes that are currently underway. Although none of the other interlocutors met their transmother’s through the internet, those under 25 years of age belonged to online communities and developed complex online personas, via their own youtube channels for example.

Dora in debt to her because she was worried about Dora. Some of Dora's clients recently found out she was HIV positive and were making violent threats against her. They regularly called her phone and left messages in which they threatened to kill her, and they graffiti-ed the following on her door, "Get out, faggot, or we will drag you out." If Dora owed Jesenia money, Jesenia had the right to regularly contact her—they were connected. Moreover, despite Jesenia's own financial need, I suspect that she wanted to show Dora that she cared about her and her well-being more than her own in that moment by allowing her to keep the money a little bit longer. Thus, she asked to borrow money from me.

Actions like these exemplify what anthropologists, have called "moral economies," or economies where the circulation of resources are not based on an economic logic but rather a social, relation, and reciprocal rationality (Edelman & Thompson 2012; Scott 1976). Notably, however, money was still at the center of the moral economies that compose trans Latina sexual economies, demonstrating Zelizer's (2005) point that money does not taint social relations but rather builds then and sustains them.

The complex circulation of money between Dora and Jesenia illustrates that I have participated in the exchange of money with my interlocutors. In fact, the borrowing and lending of money was indicative of my role as researcher and the extent to which I was trusted by and accepted into the community. Jesenia was my key interlocutor, we were equally passionate about the project, and we saw each other almost every day. We knew each other well and she trusted me. For these reasons, I assume she was comfortable asking me for money. I did not have the same relationship with all the women. As a consequence of the housing discrimination that many transgender people and sex workers experience, Katalina and her boyfriend were unexpectedly kicked out of their apartment. They lived there informally, without a lease. It is difficult for sex

workers to secure housing because they cannot provide proof of employment. So it is often a relief when landlords allow habitation without the proper documentation that ensures legal protection. Yet this also means that landlords always have the upper hand, as Katalina's did when he suddenly decided that he didn't want her and her boyfriend to live in his building any longer. They had a matter of hours to pack up their things and find another place to live. They were virtually homeless. I had a meeting scheduled to interview Katalina's boyfriend the next day so I called to confirm, unaware of what just happened. Katalina answered the phone and explained the situation between sobs, rhetorically asking, "Why do bad things keep happening to me?" I had just known her a few months but my heart ached for her. I wanted to help. I desperately asked what I could do. She just sobbed back. I then directly asked, "Do you need to borrow money?" She did. In order to secure a new place to live she would likely need the first and last month's rent upfront in cash—or even more if they landlord felt like exploiting their particularly vulnerable situation. She politely replied, "No, no, I couldn't possibly do that. I'll be okay." I felt a little hurt that she wouldn't let me help her. Although I was just beginning to understand Chicago's trans Latina sexual economy, the message was clear: I wasn't yet kin.

A few months later Katalina and I had grown much closer. We had spent a lot more time together, and mutually shared a lot of our personal histories, which have certain similarities. She had found a room to rent—informally—with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend, however, was physically abusive.¹³ One day, they had gotten into a huge argument, and he physically assaulted her. It was unclear whether he kicked her out or she herself chose to leave. Regardless, she was out on the streets. I asked her if she needed to borrow money. This time, she accepted. I interpreted her acceptance of my money as evidence that she trusted me enough to be indebted to

¹³ The majority of interlocutors had experienced domestic violence.

me. I would be remiss, however, if I did not also recognize that she had just lost a significant part of her social, emotional, and financial support system and was indeed more vulnerable than last time I offered to lend her money. Whether or not it evidences the strength of our friendship at the time, it still demonstrated the variety of factors that are taken into account when deciding to borrow money.

I would also like to add that every single interlocutor who borrowed money from me paid me back, with the exception of just one of the multiple times Jesenia borrowed money. That one time, however, I do believe she genuinely forgot to pay me back the \$10, because she was in and out of the hospital during the time because of a severe respiratory infection. Even Mercury, who was one of the youngest interlocutors at just 18 years of age returned the money I lent to her. In fact, I once offered her money as a gift. She insisted on paying me back, because in addition to doing webcam work, she was proud to report that she just got a new job at a community center. This challenges the popular misconception that sex workers and trans women of color are desperate mongers who will take money from anyone under any circumstances. Because they operate under a “moral economy” other priorities, many complex and social in nature, are at play.

Ambivalent Relations with Biological Kin

Asking what trans Latina sex workers do with money also draws attention to the relationships they have with biological kin. Because many queer youth, especially queer youth of color, like Gloria and Leticia, are rejected by their families due to their gender identity or sexual orientation, the literature on queer kinship focuses on the communities people build outside of the biological and cisheteronormative (e.g. Bailey 2013; Freeman 2007; Weston 1991; for an exception see Hines 2007). Indeed, transgender persons threaten the very ideological foundations

upon which society is built: gender, heteronormativity, family, nation. Along with other scholars of queer Latinx kinship (Acosta 2013; Decena 2011; Cantú 2009) who challenge the assumption in the literature that all queer people, and especially queer of color are rejected by their biological families, I found that many trans Latinas were not. While they find that sex work is stigmatizing and marginalizing, many trans Latina women proudly state that the money earned from sex work enables them to support their biofamilies and thus be viewed as “contributing members of society,” something they feel is regularly denied to them as trans women of color. Sociologists Acosta (2013), Decena (2011), and Cantú (2009) all point to the importance of material care in maintaining different types of kinship relations within Latinx communities. However, centering transgender Latinas, as opposed to gay and lesbian cisgender individuals described by the aforementioned scholars, introduces the importance of sex work in creating and maintaining different types of kin systems. It also highlights the significance of ideas about femininity for transgender women, whose femininity is often at stake and must be actively maintained. Overall, however, I found that relationships with biological kin are also characterized by a deep ambivalence.

Josefina is 29 years old, she is Mexican, undocumented, and proudly indigenous. She is a passionate activist and is known for speaking her mind. She very generously spent over two hours meticulously editing my interview schedule, with strong opinions about how I should phrase each question. She worked in a poultry factory, under notoriously unsafe conditions when she first arrived in 2013, but was violently arrested during an ICE raid. When she was released from the detention center, she found herself in an unfamiliar rural city where she had no money and nowhere to go. In order to have food and eventually a place to sleep that wasn't in the streets, she turned to sex work. Instead of returning to the poultry factory where she endured

atrocious conditions, she continued doing sex work once on her feet. Josefina proudly points out that because she does sex work and does not have children, she, unlike her cisgender siblings who work minimum wage jobs and have children to support, is now able to provide continual economic support to her parents in Mexico. She regularly sends her aging parents small amounts of money via MoneyGram, and is able to send larger amounts when expensive issues and emergencies inevitably arise—such as health crises that necessitate hospital stays.

Curiously, when I asked if their families knew about their involvement in sex work, many replied that their families “kinda know,” or “know and don’t know” because of the money they suddenly started bringing home, but just didn’t talk about it. For example, as soon as Dora began doing sex work she helped her parents with the bills and other household expenses. They were appreciative. Dora speculated that they knew where the money was coming from but just didn’t say anything. In her work on queer and gender variant persons in Mexico, Prieur (1998, 243) states that “there is not necessarily an either/or relationship between money and love” as she describes a similarly ambivalent view of youth by their family members once they are able to financially contribute to the home after engaging in sex work. Ambivalent relationships with family members existed amongst other trans women with whom I interacted. When Leticia and I began talking about her mother, she started the conversation by expressing resentment that her mother kicked her out. She suggested that her mother didn’t really love her. However, by the end of the conversation, when I asked her about the current status of the relationship between her and her mother and possibilities for the future she somewhat defensively said to me, “My mother loves me, ofcourse she does, she’s my mother. She also appreciates that I can buy her a nice purse.”

Dora's parents' ambivalence was perhaps related to another confounding factor. They were addicted to drugs, and Dora thinks that they likely let her continue to live with them, despite their shame that she was doing sex work, because she could help financially support their addictions. Useful here in understanding the role of drugs in kinship formation is Angela Garcia's (2010) ethnography in which she demonstrates that the circulation and sharing of drugs among parents and offspring, especially between mothers and daughters, is a way to maintain and affirm kinship ties and perform care and affection, especially if one is suffering the pain of withdrawal. Although it may be counterintuitive to think of providing drugs as anything other than "enabling" and harmful, Dora's use of the money earned from sex work to support her parents, and their addictions, is similar to the sharing of heroin amongst mothers and daughters in Garcia's study. Dora's money from sexual labor allowed her to locate herself within the family, and care for her parents by allowing them to continue affording drugs, so they too don't get "sick," or experience withdrawal symptoms which are often unbearable.

As literary scholar David Eng (2010, 8) states in his book on "queer liberalism" and the racialization of intimacy, "we must contest romanticized notions of privacy and family as outside of capitalist relations of exploitation and domination or—as generations of feminist scholarship has taught us—as free of gendered labor and value." Acknowledging the role of race in familial formation is key to contesting romanticized conceptualizations of family as unaffected by capitalism. Marlon Bailey (2013, 88) recognizes that while Black families have adhered to oppressive ideologies of family for their own protection, they have also drawn from a variety of kinship practices and structures outside of the nuclear. Similarly, Latinxs, including Black Latinxs, have long "queered" (Rodríguez 2014) American notions of family, by existing beyond, sometimes excessively so, the nuclear model. Moreover, Latinx conceptualizations of family

extend beyond borders, undermining the nation-state in a variety of different ways. Tracing the flows of money earned from sex work exposes these subversive, on-going relational networks; recall Josefina's use of money earned from sex work to support her parents in Mexico.

That money acquired from sexual labor locates trans Latinas in local social worlds and transnational flows of capital and affection is especially important to note. Not only because relationships between queer individuals, especially trans folx, and biological kin is understudied, but also because queer people have been popularly conceptualized as asocial and outside of "normal" networks of kinship and care, and are consequently often symbolically and literally violently rejected from them. Trans Latina sex workers are active members of complex local and transnational queer *and* biological kinship networks.

Manipulating Transnational Space to Maintain Kin Relations

Trans Latina sex workers are active members of transnational kin network, who also strategically maneuver transnational space to maintain kin relations with others and their own gender identities. While many women who migrated did so primarily to escape transphobic persecution, they also said they did so in hopes of finding better employment opportunities to economically support themselves and their families. Some also said they thought transitioning away from their families would be easier for all parties, since their family members may have tough time understanding and accepting their gender identities. Therefore, they strategically use the transnational space in ways to allow them to be both closer to and farther from their loved ones. Serena, for example, said when talking about her transition:

Actually that was one of the reasons why I come to the United States, because over here I can live by myself, you know, so I can no no put my family in that space, because my entire family lives in Ecuador, and the only support I have from my family was in the in the, um, by the phone.

When I asked her why she wouldn't want to put her family "in that space," she explained that while liberating, she knew it would be an emotionally arduous process for her. She anticipated having mood swings from the hormones, and really reckoning with who she was. She also thought it might difficult for her family to see her appearance change little by little; she thought it would be best for them to just see the "end result." Perhaps Serena was afraid her family would try to talk her out of transitioning. Or maybe she worried that her recovery from surgeries would worry them. Regardless, it seemed like transitioning away from home was easier for both her family members and herself. When I asked how their relationship was now, since having seen her as Serena, she replied:

Oh yes they love it! They support me, I'm the, I'm the daughter of my father, I'm the daughter of my mother.

Both Carlos Decena (2011), who studied gay Dominican immigrant men, and Lionel Cantú (2009), who studied gay Mexican immigrant men discovered that migrating allowed their participants to rearrange family dynamics because of increased ability to provide financially. They also found that distance allowed women to preserve a certain degree of openness and affection without disclosing sexual identity and perhaps losing the relationship completely. My interlocutors' experiences are consistent with their findings. However, they also introduce the importance of sexual labor in maintaining transnational biological kin relations, and the importance of gender roles. In her examination of Latina lesbians, Katie Acosta (2013) shows how care work, especially for elderly parents, helped women redeem themselves as good daughters and heal previous feelings of rejection because of their transgressive sexual identities. Similarly, my interlocutors engaged in care work---transnationally. Yet they did so not to redeem themselves as good daughters, but to introduce and affirm themselves as good daughters. As transgender women, their transgender identities were even more at stake than Acosta's

participants. Transnational biological kin networks, forged and fostered by income gained from sex work, we used by women to produce their transgender identities.

Conclusion

Sociologist Vivianna Zelizer upends widespread beliefs that money taints social ties and shows that money itself is social. In her 2005 book *The Purchase of Intimacy* she argues not only that money comingles with intimacy; it also sustains it. Furthermore, she challenges the idea that authentic care is undermined by economic exchange. Anthropologists like Denise Brennan (2005) demonstrate that money does not preclude the possibility for romance between sex workers and their clients. My research with trans Latina sex workers demonstrates that money does not sully my women's relationships with kin, both queer and biological, but instead creates and nurtures them, even across national borders and in the afterlife. Additionally, trans Latina sex workers' experiences debunk beliefs that accepting compensation for sexual acts compromises, or even worse diminishes, the self. The self, and in this case the gendered self, can at times be produced and affirmed by money gained from sex work.

Scholar of communications Julianna Pidduck (2009) argues that a queer approach to kinship challenge normative North American narratives that are concerned with continuity, heredity, and the closed, white, heteronormative intimated sphere. Instead, in her analysis of video autoethnographies, she proposes that queer kinship honor moments where kinship breaks down, such as illness, death, migrant experience, and family secret. Centering the meaning and uses of money among sex working transgender Latinas begs attention to these moment's break down. It also reveals a profound ambivalence, that does not result from ignorance or apathy, but from a deep knowing and a history of creative and strategic attempts to survive and thrive.

Chapter 6: **Working in the Club: Haunted by Labor in *La Hueca***

In this chapter I move from a discussion of ambivalence and potentiality as it unfolds in meanings of money to an example of how both play out trans Latina space-making, where monetary concerns are still central. I focus in particular on a club I call “*La Hueca*,” meaning the hallow or hole. It is a key site in Chicago’s trans Latina sexual economy of labor, and a uniquely trans Latina space.

The small dance floor of *La Hueca* is packed, and it is hot. Sweaty bodies rub up against one another as they dance voraciously to a Mexican cumbia. A colorful, fast-moving music video is projected on the large screen behind the dance floor. The camera zooms in on women’s butts as they vibrate with the bass. Two cisgender women are dancing together to my left. Earlier, one of the women shared with me that she grew up in Little Village and always heard “bad things” about *La Hueca*. Her family and neighbors would often disparage it. But once she realized that she was bi-sexual she overcame her own fear of the place and decided to check it out. She now comes almost every weekend. Dancing there, she says, is “therapeutic.” The rest of the crowd is composed of other gay couples, both men and women, and a few straight couples. All are Latinx. I am somewhat surprised that there are no trans women dancing. *La Hueca* is known as a trans Mexican club, after all. Instead, a few trans women are working their way through the tables set up in the front of the dance floor. They are all in skin-tight, short dresses, taking people’s drink orders. Many are lounging against the walls of the club, watching and waiting. And some are backstage getting ready for clients.

The music cuts off and everyone, as if on cue, immediately scatters off the dance floor and to the tables. Some are left standing because if you don’t come soon after midnight, the seats

are all taken. Regardless, everyone is patiently facing what was previously the dance floor but is now the stage. They know what is about to happen. The show was technically supposed to start at 2:30 AM, but it is 3:00am. Spanish techno starts to bump from the speakers. And finally, a tall, curvy, middle-aged trans woman struts onto the stage, microphone in hand. She is wearing a tight, sequined, royal blue gown. She slowly gyrates her hips as she looks out towards the crowd. The audience members cheer. Then, she rips the ballroom gown off. Small patches of the sequenced blue fabric barely cover nipples, and a short skirt made of frayed cloth exposes her g-string. She brings the microphone to her mouth, extends the other arm out towards the increasingly loud crowd, and belts out, “*Bienvenidos al mejor show de Chicago!!!*”

La Hueca is a space that is built by and for transgender Latinas. It is an example of fantastical trans Latina possibility and potentiality. Queer clubs have long been theorized as places of pleasure, utopia, and escape, yet the majority of the clubs described in the literature are predominately white (Rivera-Servera et al forthcoming). Ethnographically focusing on trans Latinas and their queer space-making and community building via the club draws attention to the centrality of labor in their lives. I argue that trans Latinas are haunted by labor in the club. In general, all Latinxs are inheritors of long histories wherein which Latinx bodies have been exploited for labor. Today, in the popular U.S. imagination, brown Latinx bodies are stereotypically associated with labor. Because transgender Latinas are systemically excluded from the formal employment sector and must rely on sex work for income, which can be unpredictable and competitive, they are haunted by the constant need to try to make ends meet. Thus, I demonstrate that women engage in various, interrelated types of labor in the club: sexual labor, drag labor, and spiritual labor. Women’s laboring make the club a distinctively trans Latina space.

However, as trans Latina women work to create trans Latina community, they do so within a racialized capitalist system where income-generating opportunities are scarce and differently minoritized bodies are pitted against each other. They also work within a Latinx cultural context that is informed by racist and colorist ideologies. As I argue in Chapter 4, Latindad is haunted by blackness, and this is often expressed in anti-black ideas and actions. Thus, in this chapter I assert that while trans Latina women engage in radical queer space-making in the club, they also reproduce racialized and gender hierarchies. The club, like *fantasia* more generally, is an ambivalent space. It is a place of inclusion for some and exclusion for others.

History and Space of *La Hueca*

Before describing the different ways in which the women labor in *La Hueca*, I will describe the club's unique history and spatiality. *La Hueca* is the second oldest LGBTQ club in the U.S., and the oldest Latinx "drag" bar in the nation. According to popular legend within the sex working trans Latina community, in the early 1970s, a non-binary entrepreneur known as Juanita Banana, alongside other trans Latina women, raised money by selling *discos* (records) and *tamales* in the streets to open *El Fuego* (which later became *La Hueca*) on 28th and Sacramento. Because Juanita Banana is no longer living, I was unable to learn about the development of *La Hueca* from her, nor exactly how she would describe her gender identity. While the trans women who knew her from the days of *El Fuego* refer to her as if she was a trans woman, others who knew her also said she was a gay Mexican man, named Juan Bueno, who liked to dress as a woman and go by the name Juanita Banana. Therefore, she might be considered a gay male who cross-dressed and performed drag, or a nonbinary individual. In the

context of *La Hueca*, however, people who knew her and knew of her refer to her primarily as a woman named Juanita Banana. Therefore I have decided to present her as such in this chapter. Interestingly, “Juanita Banana” alludes to a Mexican folk song that describes a determined daughter of a poor banana farmer. From *La Hueca*’s inception in the 70s, Juanita was similarly ambitious when she intended her club to be a place where trans Latina women could perform and Latinx gay men and trans women could belong during a time of extreme homophobia, transphobia, and gang violence. Juanita eventually returned to Mexico to take care of her parents, and since then the club has been owned by gay and straight Latino men. But its focus on trans women remains. And it is still viewed as instrumental in increasing acceptance of gay and trans people in Little Village, and Chicago’s larger Latinx’s community.

La Hueca is located on 26th street, which is the heart of Little Village, a neighborhood affectionately called “Mexico of the Midwest.” Twenty-sixth was recently declared Chicago’s second “Magnificent Mile,” because it’s the second highest grossing commercial district. The first, of course, is Michigan Ave., a top tourist destination downtown that is lined with high scale shops. The main strip of 26th, between Sacramento and Kostner, is vibrant, much like Michigan Ave., but in a different way. Over 500 small local businesses sell tacos, clothing, fresh meat, *fútbol* paraphernalia, spiritual trinkets, baked goods, and anything a person, especially a *Mexicano*, could need. Little Village, or *La Villita* in Spanish, is viewed by locals as the neighborhood that welcomes recently arrived Mexican immigrants. This is in comparison to other Mexican neighborhoods on the West Side such as Pilsen, which is thought of as the area where Mexican-Americans—those who have been in Chicago for generations—reside. In addition to lively businesses that line the sides of the street, street vendors selling tacos,

mangonadas, *raspados*, and *paletas* give the strip its characteristic energy. One may also often see nuns in full habits slowly walking up and down the street, rosary beads swinging to and fro.

Twenty-sixth Street at night is still lively. But do not expect to see any nuns. Instead, gang members are more visible. In fact, Little Village is known on the national stage not for its bustling economy, but for its gang violence and drug activity. The neighborhood is divided by two gangs: the Two Six controls the west side, and the Latin Kings control the east side. It was even believed that infamous Mexican drug lord Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán had connections in Little Village, though many locals resent this association. Nestled among the intermingling of religious and illicit, formal and informal economies, *La Hueca* thrives.

You can almost pass *La Hueca* if you aren’t paying attention. It is a boxy brick building without a sign, though now its name is painted in big white letters on the window, and looks small from the outside. It is nestled between a beauty salon and a restaurant that sells shrimp and chicken, and directly across the street are a number of family owned Mexican restaurants which stay open late on the weekend to capitalize on *La Hueca*’s hungry clientele. Before a long night at the club I would often stop in one and order a *flan* (you can order a regular *flan*, or one saturated in alcohol) to keep me going. While the bar at *La Hueca* serves slightly overpriced drinks, they do not sell food. Yet, at any given moment inside the club a street vendor may wander in and peddle their products. A woman who sells single roses and a man who sells tamales out of a large cooler are two regulars. Therefore, even within *La Hueca* a number of different economies, including various “illegal” ones, such as sex work, coexist.

However, while street vendors roam the club to hawk their goods, to say that they meander *into* the club would be misleading. The entrance is policed by large security guards. The increase in the number of security guards at the door and around the whole perimeter of the club

is a recent change that is viewed as a reason why the space is now much safer than it used to be. Notably, the guards are typically local Latinx men from the neighborhood who know and respect the club's importance.

When you enter *La Hueca*, after getting through the security guards, the bar is to your right. It separates the first, narrow space where you find yourself upon entering, from the rest of the club. In this initial, tight space you will likely find macho cisgender men in *vaquero* wear, including cowboy hats, boots, and thick, elaborate belt buckles sitting at the bar to your right. To your left, transgender women in short tight dresses lean against the wall and hope for clients. Most of the trans women work for *La Hueca* as performers and servers, while a few others do not but come to find clients. If you follow the long bar from its beginning at the entrance to its end, the belly of *La Hueca* opens up to your right. The center of the club is the stage where trans Latina women, and sometimes Latino trans men and cisgender gay men, perform "drag." In front of the stage are a number of tables. Club-goers sit at the tables between dancing, to watch the performances, and to just drink. The servers are mostly the trans women performers who take drink orders when they are not on stage, yet some servers are of other gender and sexual identities, such as a butch Lesbian woman.

The crowd is even more diverse in terms of gender and sexuality. Gay men, lesbians, and straight couples can be found in *La Hueca*. The diversification of the crowd is somewhat recent, as it grew and became a haven for the larger Latinx LGBTQ community, and a safer space for straight cisgender Latinxs, looking for a place to dance, especially to Mexican music. Older trans women semi-jokingly and nostalgically lament that originally, most of the patrons were straight men interested in trans women. However, it is still known as a trans Mexican space, where one can experience trans Mexican performers and find the best Latinx "drag" in the city.

Many of the performers follow the style of Miss Ketty, a famous trans Latina performer who revolutionized the style of “drag” performances in Chicago between the 1980s and the early 2000s. Ramón Rivera-Servera (2017) argues that Miss Ketty queered time and space by dramatically slowing down both music and movement on the stage. He contends that her “practice and theory” as a performer are “an important example of Latina/o queer gesture as a world-making procedure.” The slow, Mexican ballads that contemporary entertainers perform to distinguish *La Hueca* from the other “drag” shows in the city, where performers lip synch and dance to contemporary pop. The music of the performances also distinguishes them from the time before and after the show when people are dancing on the stage that doubles as a dance floor to music that is faster and more upbeat, such as: cumbia, salsa, bachata.

The Role and Importance of Sexual Labor

La Hueca is also known as an important locale in Chicago’s trans Latina sexual economy of labor. It functions to facilitate sex work in a few ways. As the night progresses, more and more trans Latina women stand outside of the club and around the club, and solicit clients. Potential clients know that if they want to buy sexual services from trans Latina women, they can just drive by *La Hueca*. Sex workers also hang out inside the club and wait for potential clients. And, oftentimes, they tell potential clients they have been chatting with online to meet them there. Because of this, some neighbors have long fought to shut down *La Hueca*. Doing so would have a number of negative consequences for sex working trans Latinas, their livelihood, safety, and well-being. Meeting potential clients in a semi-public and populated space allows sex workers to get a feel of clients before being alone with them, especially clients they found online and are meeting in person for the first time. By meeting clients in a space that was created for and by trans Latinas, they are demonstrating that trans Latina women have worth and thus may

feel less vulnerable. If they decide to have sex nearby, having the support of the people who work in *La Hueca* --people who respect trans Latina women and their work--can be immensely helpful in a dangerous situation. In such a space, the power of clients, which can otherwise be unrestrained, is checked. Clients are meeting trans Latina sex workers on their terms and in their space. In short, *La Hueca* can make sex work safer for trans Latina women.

Sex work created the space and continues to contribute to it. Most of the women involved in founding *La Hueca* were engaged in transactional sex in one way or another. And while it is the focus of disgruntled neighbors, sex work is just one of the many illegal economies that exists in *La Hueca*, and the neighborhood of Little Village more broadly. I will now turn to white queer clubs in Chicago to demonstrate uniqueness of *La Hueca* and the role it plays in creating spaces for trans Latina to access life sustaining income, performance, spirituality, and kinship.

White Queer Clubs

In order to appreciate how unique *La Hueca* as a queer Latinx space, requires not only an understanding of its impact on the Latinx community in the Westside, but also its location in relation to other queer clubs in the city of Chicago. Most of the gay clubs that have drag shows are in Boystown, Chicago's gayborhood, which is predominately white, cisgender male, and middle and upper-class. Legal scholar and transgender activist Owen Daniel-McCarter describes the criminalization of queer people of color in Boystown (2012). Boystown media, in particular, feeds racism against people of color, and especially youth, running stories that suggest criminal activity is connected to the influx of youth from the "South and West Side." The populations in both the South and West Side are predominately Black and Latinx, and local Chicagoans know that the "South Side" and the "West Side" are codes for these racial groups. In response to concerns about "crime," the local business alliance went as far as spending thousands of dollars

to hire off-duty police officers, in addition to regular city police officers, to patrol the neighborhood (Daniel-McCarter 2012, 5-6). The policing of queer people of color, especially youth, is a particularly racialized practice of exclusion because Boystown is a space of freedom and acceptance for queer white youth. Many queer youth of color think that they can go to Boystown and finally feel welcomed and safe. Sadly, they encounter the polar opposite response. This is one case of how Transgender Latinas' in Chicago suffer the consequences of the expansion of the liberal LGBT agenda and its collusion with gentrification, mass incarceration, racism, classism, and imperialism (Duggan 2002; Puar 2017; Spade 2011)

The popular clubs and restaurants that line Halsted Street and Broadway in east Lakeview are the core of Boystown. Gay clubs with drag shows also extend North West of Lakeview into Wrigleyville, where the Chicago Cubs stadium is located. It is important to note that Lakeview is one of the city's wealthiest neighborhood, and Wrigleyville is one of city's most economically prosperous areas. In and around Boystown there are over 30 gay and lesbian bars, and at least six have drag shows. They include: Kit Kat Lounge and Super Club, The Baton Show Lounge, Hydrate, Sidetrack, Roscoe's, Berlin. Amongst the performers in the shows, the majority are white, and only a minority are transgender women.

It was very soon after I had arrived to Chicago and before I knew any of my interlocutors well. So I went to Hydrate, one of the most popular gay clubs in Boystown, alone. Before entering, however, one must buy a ticket in order to be put on "the list." There are a few ticket options. The "Ultimate Girl's Night Out" includes dinner and drinks before the show, plus VIP seating and a champagne glass during the show. One Fridays this ticket costs \$45, and on Saturdays it costs \$50. The "\$35 VIP Bottle Service Package" is for parties of nine or more (though it is \$35 per person) and includes a glass of champagne and a bottle of Belvedere vodka

for the table. The “\$20 VIP Champagne Package” is for groups of three or more and includes a glass of sparkling wine and a photo after the show with the performers. There is a two drink minimum. Lastly, the “\$10 Reserved Ticket” just includes your seat but also requires a two drink minimum. I chose the cheapest option.

I entered Hydrate and showed the bouncer my ticket. Upon entering, your eyes cannot help but be drawn to a bright white bar, which is even more illuminated by a disco ball that hangs above it. Bottles of alcohol are irradiated by the wall behind it, which is bejeweled. Baby blue lights exude from the other walls. It took a few minutes for my eyes to adjust. It seemed like the show would be in a second room that was portioned off by a large curtain. I asked the bouncer if I could enter the second room, and he told me I could not. I had to wait at the bar until my party was called. I followed his instructions and headed to the bar, even though the bright light bouncing off it was hurting my eyes. I felt like my movement was a tad bit too controlled for a club on a Friday night. The majority of the club-goers were white gay men who had already begun dancing, with the exception of large, white, cisgender bachelorette party and two tall, skinny, white transgender women who coolly sat at the bar. I nervously sat at the bar and fiddled with my phone. A buff, scantily clad white gay man with a clipboard, emerged from under the curtain that separated the first room from the second room. He shouted out, “Ali, party of 12!” For a second I was slightly relieved that the raucous bachelorette party would no longer crowd the bar. Then, all the blood rushed to my face when I realized that he would yell out, in front of everyone, “Andrea, party of one!” He did indeed.

I survived my embarrassment, and followed him into the next room, where he seated me at the tip of the long catwalk which was the focal point of the space. Although spots at the front of the stage are reserved as VIP seating (which I did not pay for), I suspect he placed me there

because I was alone. Next to me were two white gay cisgender men from Australia who were seated in the adjacent chairs. It seemed they felt bad for me for being there alone, so they chatted with me throughout the show. They came all the way to Boystown to see Naysha Lopez, who is one of the hosts of the shows at Hydrate. They asked, “You watch Ru Paul right?” I lied and said yes. They went on to talk about how great Naysha was on the famous fashion show. They shared that they came to Hydrate last night for the first time and met Naysha after the show and she was “so nice.” They had a lot of fun, they got “very drunk” and were “picking up dollar bills off the floor with [their] mouths.” So they had to come back for more.

Naysha Lopez walked out on stage in a leopard print leotard that clung to her hourglass figure. She indeed was sweet, funny, and entertaining. When she is not Naysha, she is a gay man by the name of Fabian Rodriguez who does drag. She emceed the show with Mz. Ruff N’ Stuff, a black gay male drag performer. The two performers enact race and gender very differently, demonstrating sexualized racial hierarchies and racialized access to femininity.

Unlike Naysha who could perhaps pass as a cisgender woman, Mz. Ruff N’ Stuff does not, nor does she try to. While she wears women’s clothing and make-up, she also has a thick beard, and makes tongue-in-cheek jokes that draw attention to her male-body. For example, in the middle of the show she said she had to stop and fix her boobs, “which were real,” she assured the audience, though everyone could tell they were small wads of fabric. Towards the end of the show, Mz. Ruff N’ Stuff laid on her back at the front of the stage with her legs spread wide, her underwear completely exposed. As audience members walk up and place dollar bills in her bikini line, she screamed, “MY PUSSY! MY PUSSY! OH MY GOD, THEY ARE PUTTING MONEY IN MY PUSSY!” However, she had not “tucked” her penis in between her legs to conceal her male genitalia. And her bulge was the central focus of the comedic scene.

Naysha on the other hand, never joked about her gender, except to reinforce her femininity. Right after she walked onstage for the first time she took the microphone and said, in a really low masculine and stereotypically black voice, “yo yo what up what up?” After a pause she said in a high feminine voice she would use for the rest of the show, “Oh my god! I am just kidding! Would you all still like me if I was like that!?” I thought of Katalina who passes until she speaks and feels a lot of embarrassment because of this. Naysha’s words suggest that if she were masculine, or black, she would be less likable. This directly compares her to Mz. Ruff and Stuff, who is black, masculine, and does indeed use a deep voice. Therefore, in some ways Mz. Ruff N’ Stuff acts a foil that highlights Naysha’s likeability and success as a high femme, light-skinned, Puerto Rican drag queen. As discussed in chapters three and four, ideas about race inflect perceptions of gender, and vice-versa, and blackness is perceived as masculine.

Their racial differences were also highlighted by musical choices. Mz. Ruff N’ Stuff performed to black music from the 80s and 90s, such as Whitney Houston. Whereas Naysha performed to white techno. However, she did not want to risk being “too white,” as she yelled at the DJ once for playing a Britney Spears song, and then jokingly said that the bachelorette party enjoyed it, making fun of their whiteness. Notably, Naysha spoke Spanish once. Therefore, while she is racially exotic and thus alluring, she was not too Latinx, or excessively brown. It was easier for audience members, such as the two Australian gentlemen sitting next to me, to like her. Mz. Ruff N’ Stuff on the other hand isn’t as likable, by virtue of her blackness, gender nonconformity, and masculinity. Yet, both Naysha and Mz. Ruff N’ Stuff serve as embodiments of raced and gendered deviance that is sought by club goers, such as the members of the bachelorette party, who are predominately white and cisgender.

During the show, Naysha asked the audience which members where “gay boys,”

“lesbians,” “straight girls,” or “straight guys.” While trans people can be any of the aforementioned, the attention to diversity in term of sexual orientation (intentionally or not), fails to open up space for diversity in terms of gender identity. Because none of the performers were transgender, and only a few audience members were, the space is not particularly welcoming to transgender persons. Moreover, the space was predominately white. The two performers, however were people of color, reflecting a long history wherein which people of color are only welcomed into white space if they are workers or performers, so the fruits of their labors may be consumed by white patrons. Yet, even amongst the performers of color, sexualized racial hierarchies and racialized access to femininity are re-inscribed. These factors, plus the policing of queer and trans people of color outside of the club and even at its very entrance makes it an inhospitable place for trans Latinas (especially those who are darker skinned and masculine), and other poor trans folks of color. As I hopped in the Uber after the show, and immediately passed the nearby police station, I appreciated the exceptionality of *La Hueca*. It is a space where trans Latinas and other queer Latinxs in a poor Mexican neighborhood may experience some refuge from the white gaze.

Before returning to *La Hueca*, I must acknowledge that a queer Latinx club does indeed exist in Boystown. Circuit, though primarily a gay Latinx bar, was a place that was viewed as welcoming to trans Latina women for over 20 years. It was also a place where sex working women often arranged to meet clients. Rumor has it that Circuit closed because the two owners were fighting. It was recently re-opened under new management as “Fantasy.” Britnni said about the two clubs, “Fantasy is different from Circuit. Before, at Circuit, the police were way nicer. It was cheaper, the promoters were better, it was more mixed, not just gay boys.” The club opened under new ownership, and sought to redefine its reputation, especially within Boystown.



Figure 4 Naysha and Mz. Ruff N' Stuff at Hydrate.

In a newspaper article, the manager Mancini said:

I've been to clubs around the U.S., and I really want to make it an international club, if only because Boystown is known as an international (tourist) destination. Thus, (it will be) more inclusive and the shows (will be) more well known, bigger. Plus, (things will be) nice and fancy.

While he claims that it will be more “inclusive,” the focus is on being “international” and “fancy.” Trans Latinas are not part of such imaginings. Therefore, a safe haven was lost. Fantasy is like every other club in Boystown that polices who may enter and who is a part of the

cosmopolitan neoliberal gay future. Unlike Circuit, Fantasy is less welcoming to transgender Latinas, especially sex workers. The environment of Fantasy calls to our attention to why *La Hueca* is so unique. However, *La Hueca* isn't exactly a trans Latina utopian space.

Working in *La Hueca*: Drag as Labor

An ethnographic examination reveals that there are number of dimensions to *La Hueca*, and that women engage in multiple types of labor, making it a uniquely trans Latina space. “Drag,” I argue, is one type of labor in which transgender Latinas partake. *La Hueca* is known in queer Latinx communities around the country for its fantastical “drag” performances, and for the fact that all its performers are transgender women, and not gay men, as is typical. For the performers, drag is not a way to play with gender, but rather a genre of performance that is exclusive to the club. When they engage in what they call “drag,” they are themselves, trans women, performing as women in the club. “Drag,” has popularly been used to understand gender, and transgender, more specifically. I, on the other hand, flip this directionality and begin with the transgender subject to learn about rearticulations of “drag.”

Centering the racialized transgender subject reveals how “drag” can be viewed as form of labor. The women invest an incredible amount of time, energy, and creativity into their performances, as I will demonstrate below. The “drag performances,” while not prostitution, may be considered queer labor. As the performers have to perform their race and gender, perfect their body, conjure sensuality, and create a sense of joy and community among the audience members, who then give them dollar bills to reward the performers’ hard work, skill, talent, and creativity. To be clear, I do not mean that drag queens are prostitutes. Rather, I consider both sex work and sexualized performances two types of erotic labor, alongside other types of labor that are key to the trans Latina space making project that is *La Hueca*

One night, a trans woman entertainer performed to the song “*Tu y Yo*” by Gloria Trevi. Trevi is a 49 year old cisgender Mexican singer and songwriter. Her first albums were released in the early 1990s, and were very successful in the Spanish speaking world. She was viewed as an icon of rebellion among younger girls because she performed in revealing outfits and was also known to pour drinks all over her body. In 2000, however, Trevi, her manager, and one of her backup singers were arrested in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on charges of rape, kidnapping, and corruption of minors. Allegedly, Trevi and the manager took advantage of young women who idolized Trevi. Fans and critics all across Latin America gossiped about a sex cult. After spending almost five years in prison, Trevi was released and the charges were dropped because of the lack of evidence. She stayed out of the limelight for a while, but then reemerged into the public sphere in 2007, and has been steadily releasing successful albums since. “*Tu y Yo*” is a slow romantic song from her 2015 album entitled *El Amor*, which included covers of popular Latin American love ballads, like those performed by Ms. Ketty, and more fast-paced songs that represent her signature Latin Pop sound. They drag performer intentionally chose the song because the transgender women in attendance, and the rest of crowd—queer working class Latinxs living in Little Village—could likely relate to Trevi’s sexual rebelliousness and consequent criminalization. One of the jobs of the performers is to please the audience members, who express their enjoyment by giving the performers money. A way to appeal to the crowd is to strategically refer to Latinx and Latin American cultural icons that stir up nostalgia and create a sense of Latinx community. “Drag Trevi” achieved this goal.

Like Trevi in the video for “*Tu y Yo*,” the entertainer dons a skin tight, sparkly, gold body suit, but even more revealing. It is like a bathing suit, with a thong that creeps between her legs toward the front of her body, opening up to a slightly thicker strip of fabric that climbs up her

stomach to a halter top that just barely covers the flesh of her breasts. She is also wearing thigh-high golden boots, and she has imitated Trevi's mane-like, long, blonde, wavy hair. However, the audience cannot yet see what the body suit looks like below the waist. She begins the show standing in the middle of the stage in what seems like a gold dress with a large puffy skirt. Her lower body, obscured by the skirt, is firmly planted as her upper body gracefully follows the slow romantic affect of the beginning of the ballad. She created the whole costume herself. Her arms reach out toward the audience, inviting them in.

Then, as the song hits its first dramatic moment, she is somehow hoisted up to the sky! Her arms reach up toward the ceiling, and the bodice below her extends and expands. When "Drag Trevi's" voice hits the second dramatic moment, she is launched even higher. Then she is quickly lowered to the ground. The man, who we now know was lifting her up, subtly slinks backwards from underneath her and disappears backstage. Her skirt drops to the floor. Her thong, buttocks, and legs are revealed. The music drastically shifts. The slow, wistful energy of "*Tu y Yo*" is replaced by the quick poppy rhythm of "*Habla Blah Blah*." In this song, the singer describes how her boyfriend has finally left her but she is indifferent and, in fact, wants him to leave. She cockily sings, "*Ya no temo perderte y te veo. Como el cobarde que eres en realidad* (I'm not afraid of losing you and I see you, like the coward that you truly are)". She also asserts, "*Ahora sé que contarás mil cosas. Que seré la mala de la historia* (Now I know you'll tell many things, That I'm gonna be the bitch of this story)." Another notable part goes, (the latter part originally in English):

¡Di lo que quieras! (Tell them whatever you want!)
¡Di lo que quieras! (Tell them whatever you want!)
Now I can see
They are gonna be talking about me
Til way way after I'm gone
On TV's and DVD's
Overseas to peep the international throne

Those watching can relate to being left by a lover, misrepresented and disrespected by others, and even called “bitches” in particular. The performer’s strategic song choice again successfully resonated with the crowd.

As the entertainer lip syncs to the brash lyrics, she walks back and forth across the stage, dramatically swaying her hips, and sensually kicking her legs. Two men dressed in all black enter the stage to dance with her and beside her. It is somewhat rare to have male dancers join the performers so the crowd goes wild. Another trans woman walks up to the stage and throws a fistful of dollar bills above her head—while it is standard protocol to offer entertainers dollar bills while they are performing, this dramatic display is an equally rare and bold occurrence. The entertainer pivots away from the woman and walks with attitude to the other side of the stage. In Trevi fashion, she cockily tosses her hair, traces her hands down that side of her face, and repeatedly points a finger as she gestures to the audience. She looks at them, and then tosses her head the other way, stomping her high-heeled golden boots as she repeats “*Habla blah blah de mi.*” A few times she leans far back, showing the thin strip of fabric between her legs, highlighting that there is no bulge--she successfully “tucked.” Often when audience members give performers dollar bills, the performers give them a kiss on the cheek. Not this time. They bring “Drag Trevi” dollar bills and she takes them and tosses them behind herself. The performance ends with the two male dancers lifting “Drag Trevi” their shoulders. The dance routine, which the audience members also loved, was created and perfected over the course of

weeks with the help of the performers' friends, many of whom were trans Latina regulars at the club.

Older trans Latina women bragged that it took more work to be able to perform at *La Hueca* in the past, because it was harder to appear feminine and thus attractive. And indeed, cosmetic medical surgery and non-surgical procedures have come a long way. In the past, they had to create padding to place under costumes in order to appear curvy, and they would have to painstakingly pluck all of their facial hair. Nowadays, the performers have had many cosmetic surgical procedures. Regardless of improvements in cosmetic and medical interventions, however, performers are still creative, intentional, and detail orientated. They, like "Drag Trevi," design and sometime sew their own costumes, do their own hair and make-up, choreograph and practice and their own routines, and carefully chose which songs to perform to (taking their own desires into account as well as what they anticipate will be pleasing to the crowd). *La Hueca* is a unique space where trans Latinas, and their labors, talents and cultures, are show-cased and celebrated. Drag labor, however, it just one of many interrelated types of labor that exists in *La Hueca*.

***Santería* in the Club: Affective and Spiritual Labor**

La Hueca is also unique because, like sexual labor more generally, it allows for the development of trans-kinship connections via affective labor. Yet, in *La Hueca* a form of trans kinship exists that I have not yet described, a feminist ethics on another plane. In the previous chapter we saw how money earned from sex work allows for the sustenance of trans *and* biological kinship relations, challenging the assumption that all trans individuals are uniformly rejected by biological kin and thus only have queer kin, or are just asocial and unlovable in general. Many trans Latina women have active, loving relationships with trans mothers and

biological mothers. Additionally, in *La Hueca*, some women met third mother-figures: godmothers in *Santería*, who are also sex working trans Latina women. *Santería* is an African diasporic religion that originated in the Caribbean. It draws from Yoruba religion and Catholicism, and revolves around *Santos* or *Orishas*, who are different manifestations of God. Brenda learned about both transgender and *Santería* at *La Hueca*, the two most important aspects of herself and her life. Yet I argue that women's involvement in *Santería* is more than just a spiritual practice, as it has been popularly understood in the literature (Gobin & Morel 2013), but a spiritual *labor*. *Santeras* (women who have been initiated in the religion) communicate with the gods via a reading. They charge a fee for readings, and often have regular "clients," so to speak. Brenda's main sources of income are sex work and readings. Therefore, various types of labor that occur in the club—sexual, spiritual, and familial—are intricately connected in the women's lives.

When Brenda, 46 years old and Mexican, was much younger she heard about the things that went on in *La Hueca*. She was intrigued, she explained to me. Although she always knew she was a woman, she didn't know about transgender. She went to *La Hueca* as an effeminate "gay boy" and saw the trans women performing on stage. She knew immediately that she wanted to be like them. Despite the fact that she was living and presenting as an effeminate gay man, the performers "could see" that she was really trans and one woman in particular took Brenda under her wing and helped her transition. Brenda would impatiently wait for each week to pass so it would be the weekend and she could go to *La Hueca* and finally be(long). She went every night of every weekend for years. She got close with all the "girls," especially Sadia, who was slightly older and Puerto Rican and would become her godmother via *Santería*. As her godmother, Sadia initiated Brenda into *Santería*. One night at the club Sadia received the news that one of her

closest friends, also a trans Latina woman, was arrested for drug-related activities, and could go to prison for a very long time. She rushed into *La Hueca*'s tiny woman's bathroom to the left of the stage, and pulled Brenda with her, for Brenda also knew the friend. Sadia did an impromptu reading in order to speak with the *santos* and find out about her friend's fate. I cannot imagine the intensity that must have existed in that tight space.

But I had somewhat of an idea because Brenda once did a reading for me. In a reading, the *santera*, or person that is initiated in *Santería*, communicates with the *santos* via a complex ritual of rolling, throwing, and reading of *caracoles*, or cowries shells. *Elegguá*, the owner of all crossroads, acts as an intermediary. He communicates to the rest of the saints and then relays their messages to the *santera* via the shells.

One day Brenda and I had spent all morning and afternoon together, and I was exhausted. We walked to the bus stop on Western. She would travel south to Little Village, and I would go north to Humboldt Park. I was looking forward to going home and resting. Then she asked how my family was doing. I told her that my younger brother, who was serving an unusually long prison sentence for something white people barely get any time for, was going up for parole the following week, and that my family was pretty anxious about it. She offered to do a reading for him. Even though I was exhausted, I could not say no. I just learned that many of the trans Latina women I knew were followers of *Santería*, and it was my first opportunity to experience the religion up-close. It was also an honor that she would perform this labor for me and my family. I took the bus with her to the Southside.

We walked up to her third floor apartment, greeted by her parrot. "*Hola, te quiero mucho,*" it chirped as it looked at us through one eye, its head tilted to the side. We sat at her dining room table. She unrolled a mat and threw down the shells. She rolled the shells back and

forth, using the whole weight of her body to move her arms through them. She spoke to the saints in Spanish, and then Yoruba, and then a language I did not understand. She argued with them, yelled at them, pleaded with them. She was working hard. She started sweating, and then I started sweating. Though I didn't completely believe, I started to regret that I involved the saints in my brother's life and his potential future freedom. Did I compromise his parole? What if the saints said no? Would the saints forbid him parole because I didn't believe enough? Because I wouldn't kill the two white doves I was supposed to sacrifice to them? Why was the reading taking so long?! Why was the room suddenly so hot!? Finally, when I couldn't take the suspense any longer, Brenda was done. Quiet. "He's gonna get it," she said. Exhale. She smiled. I was still shaken. I didn't have cash on me, I bought her dinner so to remunerate her for her labor. The next week my brother was granted parole.

Given the intensity of my own experience with *Santería* I can only imagine what it was like in *La Hueca's* small, dark, dirty bathroom. That night, the saints told Sadia that her friend would be charged with a crime that carried a potential sentencing of 40 years, but that she would only have to serve less than one year. Sadia and Brenda were relieved. The friend would go on to serve 6 months in prison. After these experiences, Brenda was starting to believe. Recall from chapter two that Brenda finally believed after she developed a drug addiction that was predicted in a reader by Sadia years before. Also recall that when I asked Brenda how she was granted asylum when she had a number of drug related charges and was deported three times, she said it was because of the saints. According to Brenda, she would have perhaps never found her gender, her faith, her two jobs—sex work and her work as a *santera*--or her freedom if she did not start going to *La Hueca*.

It took a while for my trans friends to share their involvement in *Santería* with me, a testament to sacredness of the religion to the women and the importance of prolonged fieldwork in developing trust. Notably, however, they shared many other personal and incriminating details about their lives. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Brenda was my secondary key interlocutor whom I did not meet until about six months into the research. We became close pretty quickly, but she didn't tell me about her religion until a few months after we became friends. It wasn't until Brenda welcomed me into the world of *Santería*, that other interlocutors, whom I knew at that point for almost a year, also revealed that they had been practicing all along. I believe that they were not forthcoming about their religion because of its sacredness.

Long before Brenda generously did a reading for my brother, she invited me to her home for the first time. As when I am visiting anyone for the first time, my guard was slightly up. I knew that Brenda's godmother Sadia had passed away a few years ago. Therefore, I was surprised when upon entering she asked me if I wanted to meet Sadia. Suspicious that she might be testing me (a completely reasonable thing to do to a researcher with whom you are sharing multiple types of incriminating information about yourself) I said "sure." She replied, "Ok, you are gonna meet her now, she's in the back." Completely unaware of what to expect, I cautiously followed Brenda to the back of her apartment. I braced myself before crossing the threshold into the backroom. I was overcome by the richness of colors and shapes that occupied the space. The back wall of the room was completely covered by figures representing of all the saints, with alters full of gifts in front of each. For example, *Obatala*, who is associated with the color white, likes white bland food. On his altar was white rice and coconut meat. On the adjacent wall was a long poster of Sadia in a full-length ball gown. She gazed directly into the camera. Oh, I breathed a sigh of relief, *that* was how I was meeting Sadia. There was an altar in front of her poster that

contained candles, incenses, and gifts to her primary *santo*. *La Hueca* facilitated a mother-daughter relationship between Brenda and Sadia, one that persisted after death, which we will see in the next and final chapter is not rare.

Like Brenda, Jesenia also has three mothers: a biological mother, a trans mother, and a godmother, the latter two whom she met at *La Hueca*. On her birthday Jesenia had a party in the backyard of her home where she lived with her biological mother. After the party she posted a picture on Facebook from the event. In the picture you could see the festive decorations, such as balloons and streamers, which were placed all around the yard, but Jesenia was the main focus. She was sitting on a chair in the middle of the frame, and her three mothers were standing by her shoulders. The caption read:

This picture means so much to me!!! To my trans mother, I love you so much! To my amazing beautiful mother, that raised me to be the gorgeous woman I am today, of course thank you so much! And to my godmother, thank you for all you do for me and for always being there for me! I wouldn't be who I am today without you three! #thankful #blessed

The roles and responsibilities of the three mothers are not necessarily distinct but interchangeable, especially between trans mothers and godmothers. A godmother may offer support about transgender identity, and a trans mother may offer spiritual guidance. All three provide love and nourish growth.

La Hueca is a unique space that reveals the capaciousness of Chicago's Trans Latina sexual economies of labor, of which *La Hueca*, is an important touchstone. Like trans Latina sexual economies of labor more broadly, *La Hueca* allows for the development and expression of self and community, and the building of kinship and faith systems that offer respite and healing from the many violences that are regularly committed against trans Latina sex workers. All of the aforementioned require laboring. The different types of labor needed overlap and intersect.

Women went to *La Hueca* to sell sexual services, but found trans and spiritual mothers with whom they developed relationships via affective labor. They also sometimes got close to mothers by helping them prepare for their drag performances, for example. A focus on labor, however, also draws attention to scarcity of resources, competition, and racial antagonism.

Gender Tensions and Policing

Indeed, trans Latinx spaces, and the work that goes into creating and maintaining them, should be recognized and celebrated. In honoring them, however, it is tempting to idealize them. In fact, I sometimes feel pressure to do so, since I am representing a community about which there are so few positive portrayals. This, however, would not capture the full picture, complexities, and contradictions of trans Latina spaces in structuring trans Latina lives and sexual economies. Failing to recognize such complexity, as I have argued else in the dissertation, denies the full humanity of trans people of color, and thus has dangerous consequences. In his study of performances of queer latinidad Rivera-Servera (2012) argues that “the utopian realm of the club (i.e. community and pleasure) must always be negotiated, sometimes even fought for, in its live material context.” Discussing the space of the dance floor, he states that “pleasurable exchanges are complicated by social hierarchies enforced inside and outside the club” (135). Moreover, he describes the “frictions” between Latinxs of different ethnicities and class statuses.

Attention to labor in the club also draws attention to gender, ethnic, and racial tensions and competitions that exist in Chicago, and many locations in the United States. Different ethnicities and colors within the Latinx community are pitted against each other, as are non-black Latinxs and non-Latinx blacks in the city of Chicago (De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). Employment opportunities are increasingly scarce, and all of the aforementioned groups of people are racialized as expendable sources of labor which may be

manipulated to best serve capitalist goals. Opportunities are further reduced for queer people of color. Performing “drag” at *La Hueca* is the only option for the women to unapologetically work, in public, as themselves. It is also one of the only places where they can more safely engage in sex work. The space is small, however, and the opportunities to labor there are limited. Therefore women get territorial.

There are frictions between the women that work at *La Hueca*, and those who go to other Latinx LGBTQ clubs. Firstly, *La Hueca* is a predominately Mexican space. The music, the performances, and the cultural references made during the performances are Mexican. It is located in Mexican Chicago, and while Mexican Chicago is a place where non-Mexican Latinxs increasingly reside, it is still predominately Mexican. Puerto Rican trans women, like Katalina, don’t feel completely comfortable in the club. This exemplifies the intra-Latinx tensions that exist with Chicago. To be clear, such divisions are not stark but fluid. Katalina also has a number of friends and trans family members who are not Puerto Rican and are Mexican, and she also has Mexican clients. The Mexican-ness of such a powerful space, however, is intimidating to her. Moreover, she was afraid of the women that worked there, because they are known as “territorial.” Their possessiveness is acted out along divisions in national origin and age.

I never saw any of my younger interlocutors (those under 35) at *La Hueca*. I often overheard Katalina (age 29) say she didn’t like *La Hueca*. Then finally one when night when I was planning to go, I told Brittnei (age 27) I was going and asked her if she ever went. She said “No, it’s dangerous.” I, naively, and in an attempt to show that I wasn’t easily intimidated or scared, said that it didn’t seem particularly dangerous to me. She explained:

It's not dangerous for cis people who go and watch the show, but for the trans girls. My friend went and got cut. The girls who work there are mean to the younger girls, the fresh meat. That's why I like Boystown, I'm going to Hydrate tonight.

Upon reflection, I realized that *La Hueca*'s performers and sex workers did indeed seem older, mostly 40 years old and up. There are a number of reasons why older trans women involved in erotic labor may feel threatened by younger counter-parts. As often stated as a rebuttal to neighbors who wish to have the club shut down permanently, performing on stage at *La Hueca* and as a bar tender on the floor are the only formal employment options for many of the women. As discussed earlier, sex working in and around *La Hueca* offers a level of safety and protection not available on the street or in homes, where sex is typically sold. And the space in and around *La Hueca* is limited. Moreover, there are specific social and financial challenges of being an older trans woman—they are less desirable in the sexual market. When I first met Mariana and she gave me a dizzying overview of the major issues affecting trans Latinas, she focused on the additional obstacles that older trans women face. She explained, "Imagine, you have been doing sex work your whole life because you can't get a job otherwise, and then you can't even get clients because you are too old. Then you truly have nothing. Then what do you do? This is a reason why many commit suicide." Mariana draws attention to how ageist conceptions about who is sexually attractive make older sex workers less desirable and consequently successful in the sex market. Therefore, they find themselves with even less access to financial capital. For these reasons, the women at *La Hueca* may feel threatened by younger trans Latina sex workers, or "fresh meat."

Brittini's decision to go to Hydrate instead of *La Hueca*, however, also indicates that she is allowed to be in Boystown because she is lighter skin and passes. She works at CHI and thus has reliable income that allows her to invest in her appearance. She is very fashionable and has

had a number of cosmetic procedures. While she is Mexican and is predominately Spanish speaking, she is young, light-skinned, and conventionally beautiful. In fact, people joke that she is so “fishy”¹⁴ they thought that she got her period once a month. In other words, she easily passes as cisgender. Furthermore, her closest friend are light-skinned, white-passing, attractive, stylish, gay men. She, unlike women that go to *La Hueca* (who are older, darker, and less passable), are allowed to be in such spaces. For this very reason, the women who work at *La Hueca* may be understandably unwelcoming to her and younger trans Latina women like her.

Another form of policing that happens among trans Latinas in club spaces is in regards to gender identity. Trans Latinas are resentful of the fact that they are associated with and even sometimes confused for drag queens. The conflation with drag queens (who are typically gay men who dress as women only when performing onstage) disavows their gender identity as women. Therefore, they actively distinguish themselves from drag queens. When brainstorming ways to get more transgender women to come to CHI for testing, one of the staff suggested that they give free make-overs to clients. The person with the most cosmetological experience was a gay man who does drag. Jesenia complained to me in private after the meeting that he should not be the one giving make-overs because the target population, transgender women, “have to look like women, not drag queens.” Knowing a drag queen would give them make-overs, she surmised, may actually discourage trans women from coming in and getting tested. Many times when I asked the women about the club scene and its role in trans Latin sexual economies of labor, they cautioned me to make sure I went clubs like *La Hueca* where there are “real transgenders.” They wanted to make sure that I didn’t confuse gay men doing drag with transgender women who are performing as trans women. For trans women, there is a huge

¹⁴ A slang word for cisgender women.

difference. The former is playing with gender. For the latter, their gender is not to play with, but their identity. The women would also point out that trans Latinas face more employment discrimination than cisgender gay men. Cisgender gay men, the women suggested, did not need to perform at *La Hueca*.

Racialized Drag

In addition to gender tensions, drag is a site where racial contestations and contradictions are worked out. Competition between people of different races, especially different communities of color, are bolstered by capitalism which pits different marginalized groups against one another for limited employment opportunities. In Chicago, in particular, divisions between blacks and Latinxs have been intensified by deindustrialization, residential segregation, and gentrification (De Genova & Ramos Zayas 2003; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). Within sexual economies of labor, the only realm of employment for trans women of color who have been excluded from all other spheres, fierce competition for clients only feeds racial antagonisms. These tensions surface in drag performances where the entertainers dress up as characters of different races. Such performances are often imitations of Latin American icons and troupes that may be considered fantastical and function to unify the Latinx audience, while marginalizing some sectors. Ultimately, I argue that while trans Latina clubs offer a rare respite from exclusionary white queer space-making practices, they are also, at the same time, haunted by anti-blackness and anti-indigeneity and therefore reproduce racist troupes. The trans Latina performers demonstrate while some may view their racialized drag as affirming, others may view it as violent. I argue, then, that trans Latina performances in the club are racially ambivalent, making the club an ambiguous space of potentiality.

Figure 5



La India Maria is one of Mexico's most famous and beloved characters.¹⁵ She was created by actress Maria Elena Velasco who has starred as her in 16 films and a television series. *La India Maria* is a 'humorous' caricature of a poor, indigenous woman from rural Mexico. Her natal city changes, depending on the film, so her exact place of origin is unknown. Though based on her colorful clothing, she is believed to be *Mazahua* (an indigenous community in central Mexico). In her first film, which debuted in 1972, *Tonta, Tonta, Pero No Tanto* (Foolish, Foolish, But Not Too Much), she migrates to Mexico City, where she encounters a number of comedic misfortunes. Ultimately, however, she receives help from a famous TV personality. In the 1988 film *Ni de Aqui, Ni De Alla* (Neither from Here nor There), she immigrates to Los Angeles to work as a domestic servant. She accidentally witnesses a murder in the airport bathroom and is followed by a Russian spy who thinks she is only disguised as a Mexican. After fleeing the spy and working a number of different jobs, she is caught and deported. The end of the film suggests that being poor in Mexico is better than enduring the hardships of being an undocumented worker in the US. While *La India Maria* is stereotypically simple, she is able to get herself out of the many quandaries she finds herself in because of her perceptive native knowledge. Her bodily movements, as suggested by Drag *La India Maria*, are not smooth and graceful, but forceful and awkward.

The character has been debated by the public in the U.S. Mexico, the trans-Latina world, trans here not being transgender but transnational. While many believe she is a racist representation of indigenous people that draws on tropes which stem back to colonialism, others

¹⁵ *Cantinflas* is perhaps considered Mexico's most famous and beloved character. He uses confusing language to outwit people, and like *La India Maria*, his style is slapstick comedy. Also like *La India Maria*, he is poor and from a rural part of Mexico.

feel her presence on screen as an indigenous woman is progressive. Members of the latter camp have pointed out that her films show her navigating racism and classism. This is significant because the films recognize that racism and classism against indigenous people in Mexico exists. Mexico as a nation, like many other Latin American countries, has often denied this reality. Moreover, *La India Maria* always survives. As she overcomes different adversities, she becomes relatable to many Mexicans. As the main character, all viewers are forced to empathize with her, and thus bestow her with humanity despite her race and class. She embodies a *Mexicanidad* that includes indigenous people, especially in films like *Ni de Aqui, Ni De Alla*, where she undertakes a voyage that many Mexicans know well. In fact, the text that announces the title at the beginning of many of the films reads, “*La Mexicanisima India Maria.*” “*La Mexicanisima*” means “the very Mexican.” Therefore she is introduced as “the very Mexican Indian Maria.” Moreover, Maria Elena Velasco herself came from a poor family in *Puebla*, and after directing the 1983 *El Coyote Emplumado* (The Feathered Coyote), became one of Mexico’s few woman directors, even today (Mora 2005).

The “Drag *La India Maria*” within the space of the club and performed on stage only adds additional layers of controversy. The performer is not indigenous. She is wearing a colorful, ruffled skirt, and a red, ruffled peasant top. Of course, her hair is two long braids, representing a wholesome native woman yet untouched by global modernity and standards of beauty. The peasant native garbs a shiny shawl around her head, which she takes on and off as she talks and walks around the stage. A *bolsa* (handmade bag) hangs off her shoulder, which she draws attention to by rummaging through in the middle of her performance. She imitates *La India Maria*’s trademark whiney voice, that gets higher as she ends sentences, ask questions, or expresses exasperation. However, Drag *La India Maria*’s voice is significantly higher than the

original, so high that it is hard to understand at times. At the end of sentences, her voice is a squeak. It is dissonant sound in an otherwise musical space. Notably, every other performer who holds the microphone is lip-synching, so the microphone is not turned on and their real voices are not heard. The only voice we hear is *La India Maria's*, because she doesn't dance or lip sync, but tells jokes. She isn't sexy; rather, her performance is deliberately one that conjures up racist stereotypes of indigenous people are understood by people of Latina and Latin American

Figure 6



descent, building a sense of collective Latinx identity in the club—while also reinscribing racial hierarchies.

Drag *La India Maria* in the club tells the story of a “*güerito bien gordito*/very fat white man” in a Mexican village who is flirting with one her friends, another local woman. Drag *La India Maria* calls him over. He responds with “*¿A mí? No me gustan las indias*/Me? I don’t like Indians.” To which she replies, “*Yo no creo en los hombres*/I don’t believe in men.” The audience erupts into laughter. Notably, “*Yo no creo en Los Hombres*” is a 2014 critically acclaimed telenova from Mexico. In it, a poor girl who makes couture dresses must quit her passion to take care of her family after her father is murdered in a robbery. Much like the allusion to Gloria Trevi, and even *La India Maria*, the Mexican cultural references suggest that the performers relate to characters’ turbulent lives and the ways in which they persist and take up responsibility, to ensure survival for themselves and their loved ones.

In her joke, Drag *La India Maria* makes fun of a fat white man who attempted to denigrate an indigenous person. He assumed that she was sexually interested in him, and used the opportunity to express his sexual disinterest in, and dislike of indigenous people. She emasculates him, by saying she doesn’t believe in men, at the very moment he is attempting to assert his white masculine superiority. Therefore, her joke could be considered subversive. She plays with gender and race to undermine both gender and race hierarchies.

Drag has been theorized as critique of the gender system and its oppressive nature (Butler 1990). And indeed the performer is doing drag of a racist character, which could also be interpreted as challenging white supremacy. However, as I have argued, in the context of *La Hueca*, drag is not typically gender play. The entertainers are not drag queens but trans women performers. Therefore, Drag *La India Maria* may be viewed as an attempt to profit from (in this

case earn laughs and dollars) from a popular racist stereotype among Latinxs, and especially Mexicans. Indigeneity haunts the Latina *fantasia*. At the same time, the invocation and recognition of indigeneity, especially in a queer Mexican space may be validating for some. The debate surrounding the character on television carries over into *La Hueca*.

Entertainers also perform as those of more marginalized racial identities at Fantasy. One entertainer performed as Celia Cruz, the late Afro-Cuban singer who is called the “Queen of Salsa” and is perhaps one of the most influential woman artist in Latin America and Latinx music. Cruz lived most of her life in the U.S., and is known as a symbol of artistic freedom for Cuban American exiles. All of this is especially impressive because she is black, and is thus an important icon to the Afro-Latin American and black Latinx community. Drag Celia is wearing a skin-tight, sparkly red ballroom dress and a boa that loosely hangs around her shoulders. She accessorized with thick, golden rimmed glasses and a matching necklace and bracelet that are made up of rubies placed in thick, fake gold. In contrast to all of the other performers, but like Drag *La India Maria*, she isn’t sexy. She stiffly sways back and forth, perhaps performing Cruz’s advanced age. Cruz died at age 77 but performed regularly right up to her death in 2003. What is most striking to me, and most troubling, is that the performer is also wearing thin dark brown nylon on her arms to make it seem like her skin is black. Her neck and face are covered with make-up that is darker than her own skin tone. And she is wearing fake nose, significantly wider than her real nose. The nose is slightly lop-sided, and there is a rip in the nylon around her right

pointer finger and thumb, revealing her light skin, and thus the fact that she is may be viewed within U.S. racial landscapes as partaking in blackface.



Figure 7

She lip syncs to one of Cruz' most famous songs: "*La Negra Tiene Tumbao*," a song that celebrates blackness. It describes a black woman with "*tumbao*" or what could be considered swag. The chorus is, "*La negra tiene tumbao, y no camina de la(d)o, nunca camina de la(d)o*." The black woman walks with grace, and doesn't walk along the side. She never walks along the side." The last stanza is:

*Ven aquí para poder compartir
Porque eres tu la negra linda que me hace feliz
Otra no quiero. ERES TU LA QUE ME DA INSPIRACION
Sin ti me muero. ME HACE FALTA AMARTE MI CORAZON
Otra no quiero. Si no estas siento desesperación
Sin ti me muero. SIEMPRE AMARTE SERA MI VOCACION*

Come here so as to be able to share
Because you are the beautiful black woman that makes me happy
I don't want any other. YOU ARE THE ONE WHO GIVES ME INSPIRATION.
Without you I am dying. I NEED YOU, MY HEART IS BREAKING.
I don't want any other. If you aren't here I feel desperate
Without you I am dying. ALWAYS LOVING WILL BE MY VOCATION.

Theorists and performers have argued that by exaggerating gender, drag subverts it (Bornstein 1998; Butler 1993; Garber 1992; Schacht 2002; Underwood 2013). But what about exaggerating race? While I disagree with aspects of Butler's (1999) analysis of *Paris of Burning*, especially the murder of Venus Extravaganza as discussed in chapter four, her description of drag as "ambivalent" is useful here. Butler (1999, 384) argues that "drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and the reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms." Others (Rhyne 2004) have shown how drag can be a site where racial tensions and contradictions are worked out. I build upon these works to argue that trans Latina performances in the club are racially ambivalent. The trans Latina performers demonstrate while may view their racialized drag as a violence, others may view it as affirming.

Unlike prior examinations of the ways in which race is performed and produced during drag, ethnographically centering the trans Latinas opens up new layers of complexity. The majority of the literature on racialized drag contrasts a minoritized race to the majoritized race for example: blackness to whiteness, or brownness to whiteness. What about blackness to brownness, as we saw in Drag Celia? Or different types of brownnesses in relation to each other, in the case of Drag *La India Maria*? Latinxs are multiply racialized, and in addition to racism, colorism is also prevalent within the community, and hierarchies exist between different skin shades. Rivera-Servera (2012) recognizes this possibility and moves beyond the majority/minority dyad in his study of queer Latinx clubs. He describes how Latinx club-goers who try to distance themselves from the *chusme*, or excessiveness associated with visibly poor and working class Latinxs, suddenly appropriate such aesthetics when embracing reggaetón. He says that “this friction is unresolvable” (201). He also describes how mostly Mexican club-goers enact a “racial impersonation” by dancing to Reggaetón, which is a Puerto Rican hip hop-inflected genre and therefore closely associated with blackness (more so than with Mexicanness). While Rivera-Servera recognizes ways in which this is problematic, he ultimately writes, “But there is something deliciously rich, and of course problematic, about the ways stepping into tropicalized conceptions of latindad at the Latina/o queer club derive pleasures, queer, and otherwise, out of the historical and contemporary power differentials.”

The racialized drag performers I examine are also enacting a different “tropicalizations.” However, it is also important to emphasize that the performers behind Drag *La India* and Drag *Celia* are brown but *not* as black nor indigenous. Within existing Latin American and Latinx racial hierarchies they have significantly more racial privilege than the people they are impersonating. Therefore, they could also be viewed as non-black and non-indigenous persons

exploiting blackness and indigeneity, and engaging in anti-black and anti-indigenous projects. How might we understand what could be considered “blackface” and “brownface” in the club?

Drag Celia and Drag *La India Maria* illuminate both the tensions that exist between black and brown folks in Chicago, and the continued history of collaboration between the two groups that are similarly subject to racist projects, such as gentrification and police brutality. Naysha Lopez and Mz. Ruff and Stuff, for example, can be seen as working together to try to profit from the white, cisgender, gay, gaze. Yet they also reinforce stereotypes of blackness as masculine, and light-skin as more feminine and desirable.

Conclusion

While trans Latina clubs may be a unique, life-giving space for many, it is not always for all, such as Afro-Latinas and indigenous Latinas. A focus on economics is key. *La Hueca* is part of Chicago’s trans Latina sexual economy of labor. And unlike the people described by Rivera-Servera and the others cited, my interlocutors are not in *La Hueca* solely for experiences of pleasure and freedom--they came to earn money by using their racialized and gendered bodies in various ways. As they perform, celebrate, build kin and find God, their basic survival is on the line. And while their work is in some ways outside of dominant economies, it is still entrenched by capitalist logic. Recall Brittini’s comment that the performers at *La Hueca* are threatened by “fresh meat.” Racialized capitalism pits the young against the old, and non-black Latinxs against black and indigenous Latinxs. Sex work is the main, and often only, income-generating option for the women described, and I have argued that it has been essential for queer Latinx space-making in Chicago. But competition for clients is fierce. Therefore, within racialized sexual economies of labor, the ugly aspects of capitalism are sometimes intensified. As deeply ambivalent space, *La Hueca* is haunted by ghosts while reaching out toward trans Latina futures.

Chapter 7: Even After Death: Trans Latina Necropolitics and Phantasmal Waiting

Gloria is legendary in Chicago's trans Latina community. She was HIV positive and died in 2015 at the age of 45 shortly before I arrived in Chicago for fieldwork. Yet despite her death, I regularly heard about her and witnessed her legacy. Sadly, however, as much as I heard about her life—and more specifically her talent as a performer and her success as a sex worker—I heard about her death. Or rather, what happened to her body after she died. In this chapter I describe the life, death, and after-death of Gloria, and how her body was held for months in a public morgue. I do so with the aim of showing that trans Latinas bodies are kept in liminal spaces, or a phantasmal states, after death. In other chapters I have shown how the trans Latina body is regulated and violated by various actors while women are *alive*. In this chapter I demonstrate how this violence continues *even after death* – or specifically, how the state controls, detains, and harms trans Latinas posthumously.

To develop my argument, I engage with postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe's (2003) notion of necropolitics. Drawing from Foucault's concept of biopower, necropolitics is a form of power that deems some portions of the population worthy of violence and death and others fit for nurturance and life. I add to the growing effort in Transgender Studies (Edelman 2014; Haritaworn, Kuntsman & Posocco 2014; Lamble 2014; Sekuler 2013; Snorton & Haritaworn 2013; Spade 2011) to show how transgender people of color are "caught between biopolitics and necropolitics" (Shakshari 2013, 241). Building on this literature, I demonstrate how Gloria's body is produced and managed through governing state discourses both before and after death. In doing so, I illuminate how necropolitics are at play in the lives of sex working transgender Latinas in particular. I argue that being kept in a liminal space, or a phantasmal state, after death is a necropolitical tactic used by the state against transgender Latinas.

After Gloria's death, her biological family in Puerto Rico rejected her, prolonging her body's stay in the public morgue, while her trans family in Chicago fought to reclaim her body and honor her. Gloria's body, then, was a site of tension between her biological family, her trans family, and the state. For three months, it was in a state of limbo inside the morgue. Throughout this dissertation I have employed *fantasia* as an analytic with which to understand trans Latinas' experiences in the United States. As I have explored above, *fantasia* can refer to many facets of life, from the sexual fantasies that motivate client desires, to queer potentialities and possibilities, to the spectral quality of trans Latina existence itself, given the ever-present threats of violence and the instability and precariousness of livelihoods. In this chapter, *fantasia* further illuminates the ephemeral nature of trans Latinas' bodies. Yet, Gloria's story reveals that even after death, their bodies, and thus existences, are contentious, debated and disputed. Sex working trans Latinas' encounters with necropolitics shows that they are *fantasias* not only in life, but also in death, and after-death. After Gloria died, she was prohibited from being laid to rest. She "haunted" her families, in a more literal sense, as the state held her in a liminal space. Her trans family, however, fought for her body to be freed and her life to be honored.

Latinx Studies has also recently taken a necropolitical turn. Miguel Díaz-Barriga (2012) argues that the construction of the border wall demarcates the southern border as a zone of necro-power and exclusion where militarization and migrant deaths are normalized. Residents of the border are transformed into "necro-citizens," or citizens subjected to the forces of necro-power. Jason De Leon (2015) describes, in gruesome detail, how undocumented migrants die and disappear when attempting to cross the border from Mexico to the United States. He critiques the "Prevention through Deterrence," the federal border enforcement policy that purposely encourages migrants to cross in areas where they are highly likely to die from extreme

environmental conditions. I argue that focusing on trans Latinas, and Gloria in particular, highlights the importance of ambiguity and the phantasmal to necropolitical agendas.

I have argued that *fantasia* is an ambiguous space of potentiality. While examining her after-death reveals continued violence and abandonment, it also highlights the importance of Gloria's body to her identity as a trans woman and a valuable member of the trans Latina community and thereby exposes various dimensions of belonging after death. Therefore, ultimately I demonstrate that death, although a tragic act of violence, is also a space of social and political potentiality for trans people of color (Edelman 2014; Haritaworn, Kuntsman & Posocco 2014; Irving 2012; Lamble 2014; Noble 2013; Puar 2007; Sekuler 2013; Shakhsari 2014; Snorton & Hartiaworn 2013; Spade 2011). Additionally, this chapter calls attention to methodological challenges of trying to capture the ephemeral.

Trans Latina Necropolitics

In his 2003 essay, Achille Mbembe builds upon Foucault's (1978) notion of "biopower," or the governing of individuals and populations via the regulation of life, by focusing on the significance of death in current political and social climates. Mbembe (2003) describes the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine to reveal that the ultimate exercise of sovereignty depends on the power to decide who can and must die, or who wields "the right to kill." Citing Arendt (1966), Mbembe shows how race is inherently tied to the right to kill in the modern era. In addition to the right to kill and to let die, "necropower" or "necropolitics" as conceptualized by Mbembe, also takes account of the right to "socially" kill and commit other forms of political violence. Gloria's exclusion from school, formal employment, normative family structures, and then the funeral ritual are all instances in which she is socially murdered. However, as queer theorists and scholars of Transgender Studies, have pointed out, Mbembe's analysis neglects

gender. Thus, they have expanded the concept to include the ways in which queer people, and most relevant to this work, transgender people of color, are rendered deserving of violence and otherwise disposable in the eyes of the state, and more broadly across society.

Queer theorists Haritaworn, Kuntsman & Posocco (2014) have drawn from Mbembe's (2003) concept of "necropolitics" to understand the "symbiotic co-presence of life and death, manifested more clearly in the cleavages between rich and poor, citizens and non-citizens...queer subjects invited into death and queerly abjected populations marked for death" (20). Scholars of Transgender Studies formulate a "trans necropolitics" to describe the lives and deaths of transgender persons in particular. They do so within a larger turn to critique an emerging "transnormativity." Kunzel (2014) defines "transnormativity" as the process "whereby certain transgender bodies are valued, counted, recognized, and folded into citizenship, while others are marginalized, rendered abject, excluded, and made vulnerable to violence and premature death." Moreover, they have shown how the disposability trans people of color's bodies and lives directly enables neoliberalism, and the attending processes and systems of gentrification, racism, imperialism, nationalism, mass incarceration, and war-mongering around the world (Edelman 2014; Irving 2012; Haritaworn, Kuntsman & Posocco 2014; Lamble 2014; Noble 2013; Puar 2007; Sekuler 2013; Shakhsari 2014; Snorton & Haritaworn 2013; Spade 2011).

In their deployment of a "trans necropolitics," Snorton and Haritaworn (2013) warn against interpreting the murders of trans people of color as isolated incidents of transphobia committed by transphobic individuals. They describe the death of 25-year-old Tyra Hunter, who was in a car accident in D.C., and ended up dying because the EMTs who arrived on the scene refused to perform life-saving interventions on her once they removed her pants and saw that she

was transgender. Instead of viewing her death only as the result of an individual instance of medicalized transphobia, Snorton and Haritaworn (2013, 69) encourage “a broader politico-theoretical framework” that views Tyra’s body as a site where the medical establishment enacts “biopolitics of disposability” (citing Giroux 2006, 174). They go on to argue that neoliberalism has provided “new ammunition in the creation of life-enhancing and death-making worlds, and offer an insidious addendum to rationales for population control.” The consequences of this logic, they argue, “effaces the way power and life are maintained and reproduced through the death of certain others.”

Race is a key component to Mbembe’s (2003) original conceptualization of “necropolitics” and an essential part of the “a broader politico-theoretical framework” through which we must understand the death of transgender women of color (Snorton & Haritaworn 2013). For example, scholars have shown that when attention is given to the murder of transgender people by the state, the popular media, and even dominant liberal LGBTQ social movements, victims’ racial identities become secondary to their gender identities. Legal scholar and activist Lamble (2013) writes about how transgender bodies are “deraced” in Transgender Day or Remembrance services. While the majority of victims who are remembered are transgender women of color, because their murders are understood as transphobic acts of violence, their transgender identity is the primary explanation for their murder. Sarah Lamble (2013) argues that this decontextualizes the violence and ignores the ways that institutionalized racism, persisting histories of colonialism, and the related realities of poverty, inadequate healthcare, sex-worker stigma, and hyper-criminalization also contribute to their murder.

Gloria, and other trans Latinas who were murdered socially and/or physically, illustrate the centrality of race in trans necropolitics in the US. They also exemplify the centrality of

coloniality. We can also view Gloria's life, death, and after-death within a colonial context, since she was Puerto Rican. Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the United States. Puerto Ricans, therefore, have limited rights and a restricted form of citizenship in comparison to those born on the mainland. Yet the US is able to exploit the island and its resources without consequence, and has done so multiple times throughout history. A few notable examples include the use of the island and its population for the development of oral contraception in an effort led by Margaret Sanger—who is seen by the reproductive rights movement as the founder but by some communities of color as a eugenicist—and for bombing practice by the U.S. Navy. Both experiments have had long-lasting negative effects on residents' health and well-being. The U.S. government has encouraged migration to the mainland both inadvertently, by devastating the island's economy over time, and more directly, through exploitative programs like "Operation Bootstrap." At the time of writing this dissertation, people living on the island are still waiting for aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Furthermore, there is a persisting history of systemic discrimination and violence against Puerto Ricans living in Chicago and in other parts of the US (Fernandez 2012; Lopez 2008).

The ways in which Latinas are subjected to trans necropolitics not only exhibits the significance of race and coloniality in the US, but also of neoliberal and nationalistic projects in the U.S. In his description of how prostitution free zones exclude trans women of color, and specifically black women, in Washington D.C., Edelman (2014:174) expands the concept of "necropolitics" to "necronationalism" to focus "on the ways in which the erasure and death of the bad (queer) citizen-worker body carves out the ideological and physical space for a good (queer) citizen-worker body to emerge." He builds on Duggan's (2003) notion of homonormativity, Puar (2007) analysis of homonationalism and queer necropolitics to show how

even the borders of the LGBTQ community as policed with the same “nation-state sanctioned violence,” exalting neoliberal, depoliticized white queer individuals. Trans women of color, then, are the antithesis of the nation-state. Echoing Snorton and Haritworn’s (2013) warning not to reduce violence against trans women of color to transphobia, Edelman also explicates that the murders of trans women of color and the criminalization of “walking while transgender” are not indicative of a generalized transphobia. Instead, they “are directly linked to racialized and gendered systems of disregard and disposability borne out of centuries of enslavement, genocide, and oppression” (176). The crime of “walking while trans,” Edelman suggests, is the “‘crime’ trans women of colour ‘commit’ of visibility.”

Gloria, and other trans Latina women regularly experienced “necronationalism” in Boystown and many other parts of Chicago. As Latinas, however, they pose a special threat to the American nation (see chapter three). During the year this research was conducted 26 transgender women – at least those who were counted – were murdered. Approximately 90% of the victims were women of color. This is the highest recorded number of transgender murders in history, and does not include the many deaths that went undocumented. 2017 rivaled that one, as 28 murders of transwomen of color have been reported.

Gloria, however, does not fit into the traditional category of being “murdered” by an individual. Rather, her death, like other trans women of color, was the result of a number of compounding exclusions and violences that occurred throughout her life due to her gender, race, class and occupation. In other words, she was still killed by structural violence. Moreover, the liminal space she was kept in after death confirms that she is perceived as less worthy and perhaps even less human by the state, as represented via the coroner’s office. I argue that being

kept in a liminal space after death is a necropolitical tool used by the state against transgender Latinas.

Death was a common topic of conversation among the girls. One story I heard again and again, was about a friend of a friend who came to the U.S. to transition safely. She had experienced violent persecution in her home country for not conforming to the gender binary. Applying for asylum is a long process that requires various types of social and financial capital. So instead of applying for asylum, she came to the US without proper documentation. Despite the odds, she got here safely. She started transitioning. She finally realized their dream of living freely as her true gender. Then, she was scooped up by ICE. And deported. She returned to her natal country left mid-transition, or sometimes as gender completely different from the one as which she left. In some stories I heard, sometimes she is killed immediately upon arrival. In another version, she was killed by group of men with bats. Though I was unable to find specific examples, the collective reality of this fear reflect deeper truths. I do not doubt the stories' veracity. Moreover, they act as warnings to other trans Latinas, especially those who are undocumented. The state does not care about you. It would rather you not be here, rather you be dead. Therefore, trans Latinas' lives—and even deaths—are haunted by the ever-present possibility of violence, rejection, and abandonment.

Trans Methodologies and the Study of Afterdeath

This chapter raises a number of methodological and ethical questions. Can an anthropologist write about someone she has never met? What does it mean to write about someone after they have died? And if the focus is a person's death, why spend so much time describing their life?

As Lamble (2009) points out in her critique of Trans Day of Remembrance and the concept of “visibility,” trans people often become subjects only through their death. Puerto Rican-Chicagoan trans filmmaker Andre Perez alludes to the consequences of this when explaining why he decided to make his docu-series about trans life—and trans love—called *Been T/here*. He posits that while trans people are finally getting more media attention, it often happens through accounts of violence and death. He wanted to challenge the assumption that trans people and especially trans people of color are victims by showing that while trans people suffer an incredibly disproportionate amount of violence, they also survive, thrive, and love. In order to understand Gloria’s death, the significance of the detainment of her body, we must first know about her life. More than that, however, I do not want to introduce Gloria, a Puerto Rican transgender woman in Chicago, and give her subjecthood, only in violence and death. I want to emphasize her life, and thus her humanity.

Writing about Gloria, her life, and her death, despite never meeting her, nor conducting my own interviews and participant observation with her raises questions about the study of after-death, and more explicitly, a trans of color methodology. Studying the lives of those who are subject to exorbitantly high murder rates, whose presence in the U.S. nation is ephemeral, requires a creative and interdisciplinary methodological approach. Though I did not collect data directly from Gloria, her legacy remains and she has impacted the lives of many. I did conduct interviews and participate observation with a number of Gloria’s trans family and friends, in addition to collecting various types of data online (including videos of Gloria posted by herself and others). While I “triangulated” the data, I also trusted the words of her family and friends. Throughout this project, I honor and value the words, stories, explanations, and theorizations of all the interlocutors. When writing about someone whom I could not interview, I had to

especially depend on the words of those who knew her and are still living. Trans people and people of color in the United States are often reduced to their bodies as sites of violence and aberration and thus forbade from being considered knowing subjects. I have illustrated how the body is indeed incredibly important to the trans Latina women with whom I worked, their ability to survive and thrive, their sense of self, and even their kinship systems. I have also shown that they are not just bodies and instead also critical thinkers and agentive actors. Some scholars of Transgender Studies have proposed that transgender is an epistemological position from which knowledge is made (Kunzel 2014). Bailey (2011), for example, argues that poor black members of Detroit's ballroom scene are epistemologically and creatively inventive in their submission for the category "realness." Alok Vaid-Menon, a nonbinary transfeminine writer, entertainer, and performance artist wrote the following facebook post on March 6th, 2017:

what is becoming increasingly apparent to me is that trans women & femmes of color are only invited in the room to share about our "journeys" and not about our ideas and politics....part of transmisogyny is the reduction of trans life to *experience* and not *intelligence.*...the idea here is that trans women & femmes lack the capacity to comment on larger structures and can only speak about ourselves...what would it mean to commit to trans intelligence? to have trans femmes speaking and writing and dreaming on a host of topics with credibility and acknowledged rigor? it would require the explicit naming of transmisogyny -- how trans women & femmes are reduced to aesthetic objects for cis fantasy and consumption. it would require the collective responsibility of non-trans femme LGBT people to aggressively and consistently center trans femme I intelligence at all levels, not just the *trans* ones. it would require us all challenging the misogyny and racism embedded in separating "experience" from "knowledge" itself.

It may seem ironic that in a chapter about trans Latina bodies and deaths that I bring up "trans intelligence." Yet, while I have shown that trans women of color are more than just trans bodies and trans death, I have also shown that their bodies and deaths open up political and social worlds. With respect for "trans intelligence" and the political and social worlds forged by trans of color death, I take seriously the accounts of Gloria's family and friends, about Gloria, her life, death, and afterdeath, and the larger structures that circumscribe all, in this chapter and

throughout. I employ a trans methodology and demonstrate that the study of trans people's lives and after-deaths must acknowledge "trans intelligence" that honors the words, perspectives, and theorizations of trans women of color that are still with us. I would be remiss, however, if I did not acknowledge the power dynamics at play as I, a living cisgender woman write about a dead transgender woman. I expressed my concerns to Dora, Gloria's transdaughter. Dora said to me that I should write about Gloria, if I wrote about her like the "legend she is." I hope I have done that.

Gloria's Life

In order to understand Gloria's death, we must first understand her life. The transgender body has long been popularly conceived as "unnatural." C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn argue that the discursive construction of the transgender body as "unnatural," "produces the precise moment where we as scholars, critics, and activists might apprehend a biopolitics of everyday life." Furthermore, they propose that the transgender body of color in particular is "the unruly body, which only in death can be transformed or translated into the service of state power" (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013, 68). Before I describe the ways in which Gloria's body was used by the state upon her death, I recall how her body was constructed and managed, by both herself and other actors, including the state, during her life.

Growing Up

Gloria was born in 1970 in the South Side of Chicago. Like most women in this project, though not all, she always "knew she was a girl." When she was very young her family chided her, and unrelentingly did so throughout her life, demanding that she "walk like a man, act like a man." She couldn't. When she vocalized that she "was a girl" they told her: "No, you're a boy."

It was difficult for young Gloria. But, her characteristic rebelliousness, pride, and strength was present even then, and she continued being who she was. Despite the constant pressure and policing from family, peers, popular media, and dominant society, she refused to believe that something was wrong with her. Instead, she thought that maybe she was just born into the wrong environment. Gloria's understanding of her gender identity contradicts popular narratives that trans people believe they are born in the "wrong body." Gloria, even as a child, did not believe there was anything wrong with her gender identification, or even her body, but rather, she critiqued the larger social and cultural context around her. By the age of seven or eight, tired of her family members and neighborhood children yelling at her to change something she believed she could not, she started to block them out. She spent a lot of time in her room watching television, where she could escape.

Gloria was comforted when for the first time she saw drag queens on *Sabado Gigante*—a Spanish language variety show that aired every Saturday on *Univision* for over 50 years beginning in 1962. However, she started feeling hopeful when she saw her first "transsexual" on the *Sally Jesse Raphael* talk show program (see also Gamson 1998). It was in the early eighties and she was about 13 years old. The "transsexuals" on the show weren't just entertainers, they were women off-stage too. They lived their lives as women. When she saw a "beautiful transsexual Latina woman" on the popular Spanish language talk show called *Cristina*, she started dreaming about the possibility of one day being accepted for who she was. The host, Cristina Saralegui, was Cuban American. All of her guests were Latinx, and many were Puerto Rican. Trans Latina women on *Cristina* validated Gloria's gender, and also her race. Not only were there women like her, but there were other *Latina* women like her. She wasn't wrong after all. And she was not alone. If they had the strength to live as their true selves despite societal

pressures and violences, then so could she, young Gloria thought, alone in her bedroom while other children played outside. When she was not watching TV, she day-dreamed about becoming a famous performer and getting married. She was always the bride.

Gloria's parents were protective and, with the hope that a strict, religious, education would change Gloria, they sent her to Catholic school on the South-Side, unlike her brothers who attended public school. She was resistant to the Church's policing of gender and sexuality, yet she felt the desire to fulfill women's roles outlined in Catholic ideology. By the time Gloria entered high school, she was more comfortable with herself. While her parents chastised her for her gender expression, at the same time they told her and her brothers "to always hold your head up high." Luckily, she internalized the second message. She saw high-school as a new beginning, an opportunity to start living as her true self outside of her day-dreams in front of the TV in her bedroom.

Newly confident and energetic, she did not have a hard time making friends. Her friends included cisgender male students who were gay, as well as cisgender women who were straight. Protected by her group of friends and her reputation as being tough, she, unlike the rest of the interlocutors, was not repeatedly bullied by her peers. She was smart and excelled academically.

She started dressing in a more feminine manner outside the confines of her room and when she went to school. Her teachers kept sending her home because she violated the school's gendered dress code. She was confused, discouraged, and angry. She was doing well in classes and was not getting into trouble. In her mind, a pink top or lipstick did not warrant punishment; it wasn't disrupting anyone's education nor causing anyone harm. Moreover, she was respectful and smart. She should felt she should be acknowledged for the woman she was.

Because Gloria enjoyed her classes and seeing her friends, she endured transphobic treatment by teachers and administrators and continued going to school up until senior year. It was then, however, when she realized she wouldn't be able to go to prom on her own terms. She could not wear a dress, and she could not go with a male date. To her, this was the same as not being able to go at all. She didn't understand why she was being denied fun, formative experiences that everyone else was allowed and even expected to have. That was the last straw. No one else in her family had graduated high school and she wanted to be the first. But if she couldn't receive her diploma for being herself, then she didn't want it at all. She left the formal educational system.

Becoming a Woman

Gloria left school in her senior year, and as a consequence, was kicked out of her home by her parents. She was on the streets for the first time. It was the late 80s, and Chicago's gang activity in the South-Side was notoriously high. Five or six gang territories fell within the five-mile radius of her school. Gloria herself was surprised when she learned that the people who lived and worked on the streets, including gang members, respected and accepted her as she was. In fact, like some of the other girls in the study, Gloria had a number of romantic relationships with gang members, one of whom was particularly high ranking. While no high ranking gang-member would openly admit to be romantically or sexually involved with a transwoman, the girls revealed that it happens more often than one would assume. And in fact, in some ways, gang-bangers' hypermasculine gender expressions make them highly desirable lovers for trans Latina women.

Gloria was only attracted to cis-gender men who were read as hypermasculine, men who looked like they could protect a woman and themselves if need be—men who were undeniably

“men.” Like many of the other women, Gloria made it clear that she was only attracted to (cisgender) men who were strictly heterosexual—and not homosexual--since she was a woman, and not a man. The requirement that partners are heterosexual cisgender men was a way women affirmed their gender identity as women (see also Kulick 1998). If they were in a relationship with a man who was gay, or who appeared to be gay, it could threaten their female identity by suggesting that they were men. Although not all trans women are straight, it does point to the fact, as many women also felt compelled to teach cisgender individuals like myself, that “gender identity is different from sexual identity.” They often repeated this to me. At the same time, however, they are intricately related. Gloria’s gender identity was “woman,” while her sexual orientation was “heterosexual.” Yet, given popular, limited, homophobic understandings of gender and sexuality, her gender identity was reinforced by her sexual orientation.

The way some trans women talk about their relationships with gang-bangers also suggest that trans Latinas were preferred by macho gang-bangers because of their Latina hyper-femininity. Some, including Gloria bragged that they loved to cook, clean, dance salsa, and spoil their men, like any “good” --or stereotypical--Latina woman.¹⁶ Just as hypermasculine “gangbangers” affirmed trans women’s femininity, it appears that trans women also bolstered gangbangers’ masculine identities, even if just in private. Some relationships between trans women and gang-bangers were public, yet notably they involved trans women who had a lot of plastic surgery were thus had very stereotypically attractive bodies. Such conventionally beautiful women, however, did not necessarily “pass.”

Gloria’s first relationship with a gang-banger, however, was not out in the open, but hidden from the public. Yet, because she was still not living “full-time” as a woman, Gloria was

¹⁶ While the majority of my informants adhere to the gender binary, not all trans people fit nor the associated stereotypes about appearance and behavior.

affirmed by it. She enjoyed being able to be herself when alone with her man. And she was even accepted by his mother, because she also acted as the ideal “daughter-in-law” helping her partner’s mothers with domestic duties she was otherwise had to do herself, such as taking care of her grandchildren, including Gloria’s boyfriend’s children. Gloria was especially helpful to her *novio*’s mother because she did not speak English, while Gloria did. Gloria felt like a valuable part of a family and her and her man had an agreement. She felt like she was finally living her dream of being a housewife. Additionally, she felt physically safe with her *novio* because the South Side was becoming increasingly dangerous.

As a result of the War on Drugs launched by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, gang violence and police violence escalated. As Gloria became more comfortable with her role as a housewife and daughter-in-law, she started spending more and more time living a woman. The relationship, however, did not grow with Gloria, and ended when Gloria grew tired of her *novio*’s philandering with other women. He was her source of economic support, so Gloria needed to support herself. She had been pushed out of school and had no professional skills to sustain herself economically. She turned to sex work to put herself through cosmetology school.

When Gloria became a cosmetologist, she finally met a first trans Latina woman in person for the first time. Her name was Peach and she was Mexican. Peach lived “full-time” as a woman, and Gloria saw that people knew and respected her. Peach became a regular customer of Gloria and she and Gloria would catch up on *chisme* (gossip) and “girl talk” while Gloria did her hair and make-up before she worked at a club where trans women performed “drag.” Peach invited Gloria to the club to meet the other girls and assist with their hair and make-up. Gloria went, worked, and got close with the girls who performed there. Gloria was enamored. She saw how Peach, and the others, were able to perform on stage like glamorous stars, something

Gloria herself always wanted to be. Moreover, when they were offstage they still lived as women. They encouraged Gloria to perform. Gloria was nervous but knew it was her calling. She entered a talent show at the club, and since then did not stop performing until she was physically unable towards what would be the end of her life. Peach and the other girls also encouraged Gloria to live as a woman full-time. With the help of the other women at the club, Gloria learned how to look more feminine, started undergoing plastic surgery, and finally started living a woman “24/7”.

Proudly Trans, Puerto Rican & Sex Working

Gloria was a successful cosmetologist and performer, and as her appearance became more feminine she made more money via sex work, and vice versa: the more money she made via sex work the more surgical procedures she could afford to feminize her appearance. She worked incredibly hard, all of her careers physically and emotionally demanding, to slowly afford all of the surgeries that resulted in her signature hourglass figure. Twenty years later, at the age of 40, she was still stunning. She was a sought-out sex worker and a celebrated performer. Many young trans Latinas looked up to her.

Once Gloria left the fantasy world of her childhood bedroom she was determined to be a part of “society.” And as she transitioned and lived as a woman full-time she was even more determined to be herself when out in public. Her desire to assert herself in public is significant for a number of reasons. Indeed, a lot is at risk for transwomen, especially those involved in sex work, when out in public. For example, recall the woman who had a brick thrown at the back of her head from a car passing by, simply for walking down the street. Many women express fear of leaving their homes, because of the physical, sexual, and verbal harassment they constantly experience when they do so. Both Katalina and Veronica displayed thoughts and behaviors that

could be considered symptoms of “agoraphobia.” Veronica, one of Chicago’s highest paid Trans escorts, wondered whether her fear of being out in public had escalated into “social anxiety disorder” and/or “panic attack disorder.” Her self-described “anxiety” often prevented her from leaving her home.

Sex work done in the home, although seemingly more dangerous, was actually viewed by Katalina, Veronica, and others, as the safest option. It prevents them from leaving their homes where they are exposed to potential violences from various sources, and allows them to feel more in control of their surroundings when working. Unlike Katalina and Veronica, however, Gloria was extroverted and strived on social interactions with other people, which was evidenced in her passion as an entertainer. Gloria proudly walked around in public, and often talked about the importance of being in public as trans Latina, and a trans Latina sex worker. She was speaking back to systemic transphobia that renders transgender people, especially transgender women of color and sex workers, invisible, illegible, and even unhuman. Furthermore, she was pointing out that she was brave enough to try to defy such powerful formulations.

The *barrio* of Humboldt Park was a place where Gloria felt that asserting her presence and being seen was particularly important. She loved the large park which is the *barrio*’s namesake, but her presence in the park itself was not necessarily radical. The park is known as a place of seediness and crime. A large homeless population resides in Humboldt Park, and many of its members are drug users. Gang-bangers hang out in the park. Cis-gender gay men, or “gay boys” sell sex to other cis-gender men. And occasionally trans women will sell sexual services in the park too. Gloria easily fit in with this crowd, and while she valued her times in the park, it was not the in park where she sought recognition, but rather the larger Puerto Rican community outside the park.

Gloria had a stressed relationship with her parents ever since they kicked her out, but once she started living as a woman full-time and demanded that they call her Gloria and use she/her/hers pronouns when referring to her, they fully excluded her from the family. Soon after, they moved back to Puerto Rico without saying goodbye to Gloria. Her desire to be seen in Humboldt Park was perhaps a way to assert herself and seek acceptance from her Puerto Rican heritage, and maybe, by extension, her biological family. She sought recognition in the socially acceptable parts of Humboldt Park, such as *Paseo Boricua* where all the businesses and community centers are located. When she hung out on *Paseo Boricua* and someone said something transphobic to her, she would quickly retort with “Let me scroll through my contacts and make some calls, because I know some of your pockets will be ringing.” The implication was that even though they were ridiculing her in public, they were her clients—they paid for her services, her charm, and her body, in private.

There was one time of year when her visibility in the park was of paramount importance to Gloria: The Puerto Rican Festival. The huge celebration happens over the course of a weekend in June, and is a pillar of Puerto Rican Chicago. Gloria bragged that she had never missed a festival. She would add that she was proudly Puerto Rican, and therefore naturally loved the fest. She would get even more dressed up than usual, wearing even more make-up and figure-flattering clothes, before going to flaunt her Puerto Rican pride. By going to the fest even more dolled up and thus more visibly trans, she was showing the world that there are trans Puerto Ricans, that she belonged to Chicago, Humboldt Park, and Puerto Rico, as a trans woman and a known sex worker. Moreover, she demonstrated that trans Latina women could be confident and beautiful. Her presence, because of her energy and her appearance, was always dazzling. But still

tough. While trans visibility is fraught (Gossett et al 2017), for Gloria, making her presence known as a Puerto Rican, a trans woman, and even a sex worker was an act of resistance.

One of Gloria's proudest moments was when a cisgender woman on *Paseo Boricua* nervously approached Gloria to share that she thought her child might be trans. The mother wanted to help her child but didn't know how, and moreover, didn't know who to turn to. She was so relieved when she saw Gloria just walking around the hood. Gloria shared some of her own experiences growing up trans with the mother and gave her specific advice about how to best support her child. The mother was so thankful. Gloria felt that precisely because she was out in public, making herself seen, she was able to improve a young trans person's life.

Alas, as I have shown throughout, there are potentially lethal consequences of transgressing gender boundaries with the body. Gloria, like all of the other girls, was regularly verbally, physically, and sexually harassed when out in public. She was arrested multiple times when walking around Boystown, Chicago's "gayborhood." The transgender body, then, is site of contestation between individuals, society, and various arms of the state that seek to exclude them, such as: the biomedical world, the legal system, the prison industrial complex, and businesses that compose commercial districts. Gloria refused exclusion by proudly putting her body on display. On a more personal level, Gloria's body was of particular value to her because it affirmed her identity as a woman, and more specifically, a beautiful brown woman. It enabled her to be a successful sex worker and a performer—the latter her life-long dream. Therefore, her visibility as a trans Latina, a sex worker, and a performer defied many societal expectations and attempts to govern and police her.

Scholars have pointed out the fraught nature of visibility for queer individuals, especially queer people of color (Ferguson 2004; McCune 2014; Haritaworn, Kuntsman & Posocco 2014). While some Transgender Studies scholars have advocated for increased visibility and representation--both culturally and legally—others such as Spade (2009), Lamble (2013), Irving (2013), Snorton & Haritaworn (2013) have more recently cautioned that such an approach can reinforce violent neoliberal, imperialist, racist projects (Kunzel 2014). An ethnographic examination, however, reveals the tensions around (in)visibility that exist in people's everyday life. Gloria was familiar with the dangers of visibility, yet having her body and self be seen out in public, as she was, was personally important to her. Snorton and Haritaworn (2013) argue for a “reconsideration of lives structured alternately by illegibility and spectacle.” They write, “Those lives also carry a productive force—particularly in death—that sheds light on the borders where biopower and necropower brush against each another in everyday life.” Gloria's case is exemplar of the border between visibility and invisibility, and biopower and necropolitics.

The (After)Death of Gloria

Her Decline

Gloria was HIV positive. Almost all of the girls report using condoms when having sex with clients. Yet they also recognize instances in which one would succumb to a client's request to have unprotected sex, for which they get paid more. One such instance is when experiencing prolonged hunger from not being able to afford food. Another instance is if one is struggling with a drug addiction and needs a fix. Gloria struggled with addiction for a few years in her 30s. It was then when she had unprotected sex with clients and likely contracted HIV. Though Gloria was on antiretrovirals for over 10 years by the time she was 45 and was otherwise in good health, she started getting sick. She was plagued by infection after infection. Inflammation of her legs

prevented her from walking long distances and she eventually had to use a wheelchair in order to leave her apartment. Still determined to be out in public and not trapped in the confines of her home, she bought a wheelchair and hired a van and driver to transport her to social events in the trans community and in Puerto Rican Chicago. She went to the *Fiesta Boricua de Bandera a Bandera*, a celebration in September that is only slightly smaller than the famous Puerto Rican festival in June. It is a celebration of the Puerto Rican community that exists in “Paseo Boricua,” the portion of Division Streets that lies between the large steel *banderas*--the heart of Humboldt Park. Gloria also attended a vigil in Boystown in honor of members of the LGBTQ community that passed of AIDS. Despite her suffering, she was fully made-up and still her loud, proud, boisterous self. Then, an infection in her lungs prevented her from going out. She was forced to stay home. Her friends reported that for the first time ever she seemed depressed, like she was “giving up.” Soon after, she died, alone in her home, at the age of 45. Just months before she had been gracefully cha-chaing across the stage, her beautiful face and body illuminated by the bright lights.

Even After Death

Because Gloria did not have life insurance, her body was sent to the public morgue. Typically in the U.S. biological family or “next of kin” identifies and claims the body. Because Gloria was unmarried and her biological family had returned to Puerto Rico, no one was present to claim her. Non-legal kin can claim the body if they have proof that they will properly dispose of it, or in other words, a receipt of funeral arrangements. The average cost of an American funeral is \$6,000, and even the simplest option costs almost \$2,000. Gloria’s trans family, all of whose main source of income was sex work, could not afford such a cost, however they did not want the state to dispose of the body. At best, the state would place her body in an unmarked

“pauper’s grave,” and they feared that they state would do worse. Yet, at the same time, her trans family members were hysterical that Gloria’s body was laying unclaimed in the public morgue until they could find someone to make funeral arrangements. In 2012, a number of news articles (some with pictures) were released claiming that Chicago’s morgues were overcrowded and backlogged, causing bodies to be kept in unsanitary and disrespectful conditions, because of statewide budget cuts (Huffington Post 2012). Desperate, Gloria’s transdaughter Dora called Gloria’s mother in Puerto Rico, even though she knew they did not have the best relationship. Gloria’s mother answered. Dora told her that Gloria died, and nervously explained the situation. According to Dora, Gloria’s mother replied with, “I don’t have a daughter, as far as I am concerned I had a son, and he died a long time ago.”

Other members of Dora and Gloria’s trans family contacted the coroner’s office regularly. They were confused about the requirements to free Gloria’s body, and desperately tried to work out an arrangement. The officers were curt and unsympathetic. More notably, they misgendered Gloria. While they used her name, since Gloria had legally changed it, they referred to her with he/him/his pronouns. Many have noted that the deaths of transgender people are largely ignored by the mainstream media, and that when they are acknowledged, the victims are often misgendered via the incorrect use of pronouns (Lamble 2013; Moran & Sharpe 2004; Snorton & Haritaworn 2013). Gloria’s trans family was well-aware of this reality, and viewed the coroner officials’ misgendering as an intentional act of transphobic violence and invisibilization on behalf of the state, especially because Gloria and her family could not afford dignified funerary arrangements.

After three months, Gloria’s body was still in the morgue. Her trans family was devastated. Even collectively, they did not have enough money to release it. They felt, yet again,

that the state was policing, detaining, and abusing the body of a poor trans woman of color. The thought of Gloria's body decaying in the morgue was upsetting to her family for a number of reasons. The majority of her trans kin were Catholic, and viewing the body during a wake is an important part of the funeral ritual and the grieving process. Sadly, the inability to view Gloria's body felt all too familiar to some of her older queer kin. VIDA/SIDA, an organization on *Paseo Boricua* that provides a number of services to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS amongst Latinxs in Humboldt Park, was founded over 25 year ago at the height of the HIV epidemic. In fact, Gloria had volunteered there on and off over the years. When it opened it purposely chose the name "VIDA/SIDA" to reduce the association of HIV and AIDS with death ("SIDA" is "AIDS" in Spanish, and "*vida*" is Spanish for "life"). Founders, and everyone one else I spoke to who could recall the birth of VIDA/SIDA, specifically traced the proliferation of stigmatizing discourses relating HIV and AIDS to death to the fact that, at the time, anyone who was suspected to have died of AIDS was not allowed to have an open-casket funeral. The founders of VIDA/SIDA believe that this lead to a dehumanization of gay and trans people in the Latinx community. Gloria's older queer family saw her detainment in the morgue and the subsequent inability to put her body on display during a funeral as just a new manifestation of the perpetual dehumanization of queer people, even after death.

Furthermore, that Gloria's body was being held in the morgue was particularly tragic to her trans family because Gloria's place as a respected figure in the community was, in a lot of ways, related to her body. As transwomen and sex workers they appreciated the work that Gloria had invested in perfecting her physique. Her body was incredibly important to her identity and success as a proud sex worker, performer, and woman. Now it lay naked and misgendered in a public morgue. Her trans family continued trying to reach different biological family members,

who all rejected Gloria, while also trying to make agreements with the coroner's office and different funeral homes who were all unresponsive. They suspected this was because Gloria was trans, Puerto Rican, and poor. Thus, even after death, Gloria's body was a site of tension between her trans family, her biological family, and the state. Gloria remained in a liminal state, and her trans family was quite literally "haunted" by her. The inability of Gloria to be put to rest—the way in which she was more was literally made phantasmal—is an example of how necropolitics are enacted on trans Latina bodies in particular.

Gloria's body was only freed because her trans family creatively garnered enough money from a combination of a number of different sources to have her cremated by a funeral home. They held drag shows at LGBTQ clubs such as *La Hueca* where they explained the situation to the audience members and passed around a basket to collect donations. During the performances, they projected a slideshow against the back wall of the stage that was comprised of pictures of Gloria. Her trans family also raised funds via websites such as "gofundme," where they similarly featured a number of beautiful pictures of Gloria. They raised enough money to have Gloria cremated after three months of fundraising. And as they raised money to finally put her to rest, they were able to publicly celebrate and honor her and her life despite being prohibited from doing so through more official and normative means. Her ashes were spread in one of her favorite parks where she sometimes solicited clients.

The Possibilities in (After)Death: Protest, Transfamily, and Queer Space

Snorton and Haritaworn (2013, 66) point out that the afterlife has a particular resonance for Transgender Studies: "It provides a framework for thinking about how trans death opens up political and social life-world across various times and places," and it "act as a resource for the

development and dissemination of many different agendas.” Gloria’s afterlife, like the afterlife of many transgender Latinas, is full of political and social life-world making.

While scholars of Transgender Studies have pointed out that liberal LGBTQ organizing, including dominant transgender organizing, has historically overlooked the role of race in the deaths and murders of transgender women of color, this inadvertently takes attention away from the activism done by trans women of color themselves, much of it in direct critique of dominant LGBTQ activism. The Trans Latina Coalition, for example, regularly stages large-scale actions that interrupt business as usual to draw attention to the murder of transgender women of color. The members of the Los Angeles chapter have held several protests at busy intersections and commercial districts in Los Angeles, such as outside the Beverly Center. They hold signs up that say “Don’t Kill Me,” “Stop Killing Us,” and “Trans Lives Matter.” Trans Latina protestors often have dark red paint splattered across their bodies like blood. The Creating Change Conference is the annual event for the National LGBTQ Taskforce. One of the largest LGBTQ conferences in the world, it draws 3,500 attendees each year. However, those most marginalized by liberal LGBTQ organizing, such as people of color and trans and genderqueer folks critically refer to the conference as “Creating Chains.” During the 2015 meeting in Denver, Colorado, members of Trans Latina Coalition and allies occupied the main stage in protest of the recent murder of 17 year old Jessie Hernandez by Denver police. In 2016 they interrupted Los Angeles’ annual Pride Parade, which is one of the biggest in the country, with a procession of coffins made out of cardboard.

Such intersectional and necropolitical activism is on the rise, especially in the city of Chicago. On March 3rd of 2017, the “Trans Liberation Protest Chicago” was held downtown at the corner of Wacker Drive and Wabash Avenue, near the Trump Tower. It was organized by

LaSaia Wade, A black trans woman and activist, in response to two things. One, the increased organizing in Chicago in the wake of newly inaugurated President Trump oftentimes does not involve the input of nor center trans women of color. Second, though only two full months into the New Year, at least seven trans women of color had been murdered--that we know of. Notably, the call for “trans liberation,” echoes what lawyer and activist Dean Spade (2011) called a “critical trans politics,” that goes beyond the limits of leftist LGBTQ politics focused on legal recognition and equality claims. It intersects with the political agendas of prison abolition, wealth redistribution, and organizing against immigration enforcement. Over 1,000 people attended the protest. The success of the event is a testament that trans deaths, especially trans of color death, is a space for radical political resistance.

An ethnography of trans of color death not only illuminates new political worlds, but also social ones. In fact, many girls who practice *Santería* have alters dedicated to their transmothers who have passed. A few girls’ deceased mothers were famous performers like Gloria, and large posters of them perfectly posed hung behind their alters. Recall, in Chapter 6, when I went to Brenda’s house for the first time and “met” her dead transmother via the beautiful altar Brenda dedicates to her. The trans Latina community is sustained via connections to deceased ones.

To return to this chapter’s focus on Gloria, my ethnographic account of her afterlife forces a recognition of the complex kinship and care that is exercised by trans family upon and after death. Gloria’s body was finally released from the public morgue only after her trans family raised enough money via drag shows in LGBTQ clubs that specifically honored Gloria and her legacy. Many of her trans family members are drag performers like Gloria, and they used their personal skills and the resources available to them to take care of their own. They projected a montage of stunning pictures of Gloria on the wall behind the stage, while they performed to

songs that were both sad and inspiring. They explained the need for money and presented Gloria's detainment in death as an extension of the systemic violence committed against trans women of color in life. During the performances they passed around a bucket where audience members could make contributions. They also raised money via fundraising websites such as "gofundme.com" On the first World AIDS Day (December 1st) after her death, though they had already released Gloria and spread her ashes, they again dedicated drag performances to her legacy as a way to celebrate her life. They also seized the opportunity to raise awareness of the biopolitical and necropolitical treatment of trans women of color, as they used Gloria's story to raise money for local HIV/AIDS organizations that serve transgender Latinas. As discussed in the previous chapter, LGBTQ clubs and the world of drag are fertile grounds for the development and maintenance of trans familial bonds.

In her discussion of the death of Gwen Araujo, a 17-year-old transgender Latina in Newark, California, who was violently murdered by three men she considered friends, Heidenrich (2006) focuses on the activism done by her family after her death, specifically around considering her murder a hate-crime. She questions claims of scholars such as Spade (2011) who represent a new turn in Transgender Studies by contending that hate-crime activism cannot create structural change because it depends on legal strategies and individual rights discourses and thus obscures structural violence. Heidenrich argues that hate-crimes are not individual acts but rather connected to larger systems of oppression and targeted against entire communities, a point that Araujo's lawyer made in court. Therefore hate-crime activism spurred by Gwen's family challenges the current interlocking systems of oppression. According to Heidenrich, the mobilization of Gwen Araujo's family after her murder indicates that resistance to violence, white supremacy, and systemic transphobia is possible. Using a variety of tactics that draw from

Chicanx activist practices, they urged the police to locate her body, they shared their story with English and Spanish news companies, and they started a fund for transgender education (73-75). They insisted that Gwen's life mattered, and they did so despite their economical and racial marginalization and the lack of support from public institutions.

An ethnographic examination of Gloria's life, death, and afterdeath perhaps relieves tensions between those who celebrate right, visibility, and protection, on the one hand, and those who critique it by revealing the usefulness of both Spade's (2011) approach which is critical of the limits of visibility and Heidenrich's (2006) perspective which still finds value in visibility, on the other hand. Specifically, Gloria's transfamily used trans tactics of survival and resistance to speak back to trans biopolitics and trans necropolitics and humanize and honor Gloria's body and life while creatively working within the system. Yet, at the same time they, and trans of color activists such as LaSaia Wade, are also enacting a "critical trans politics" that centers trans women of color and exceeds the capabilities of the current system, which in fact depends on a trans biopolitics and trans necropolitics. An ethnographic examination of afterdeath reveals that people wield various types of resistance at once. Gloria, herself, was known for saying, "It may take many tries and many different roads, but you can still do it, honey!"

Conclusion:
An Ambiguous Space of Potentiality: “Business as Usual” during Ambivalent Times

It was my first time meeting up with Jesenia after my fulltime fieldwork in Chicago that I conducted from June 2015 to August 2016, and it was my first time seeing her in person since the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017. Jesenia—a 36 year old, Puerto Rican, sex-working, transgender woman—had become a close friend during my fieldwork. In fact, I saw her a few times a week, every week for a year. I would buy her coffee at Dunkin Donuts, and sometimes she would buy me a *piragua* from a street vendor, and we would walk up and down *Paseo Boricua*, where she lived and worked, and volunteered in an addiction treatment program. She too had struggled with drugs in her early twenties, but had been sober for over ten years. She was proud of her sobriety as were other women in her circle. She was in good health, and volunteered at the program as a way to give thanks for her life and comfort others suffering through the throes of addiction. However, like many other trans women, Jesenia would proudly explain to me that trans Latina women do not work the streets to feed drug habits, like cisgender sex workers, but because they cannot get hired in the formal sector.

While this distinction between cisgender and transgender sex workers may not always hold true, it articulates the fact that systemic transphobia in the legal employment sector is one of the main reasons trans Latinas turn to sex work. Notably, as I have shown throughout my dissertation, systemic transphobia is intersected and compounded by wider politics of racism, anti-immigration policing, and what it means to be Latina in the US racial(ist) regime. This is especially salient for undocumented trans Latinas and Afro-Latina trans women. Having to navigate these processes, plus the violences frequently encountered in sexual labor, makes for a life of precarity. Jesenia was one of my most reliable interlocutors. Our regular walks punctuated

my fieldwork which was otherwise nebulous and unpredictable. She was a rock for me in a lot of ways, and I missed her. So I was excited to see her again.

We were supposed to meet at the Pilsen Library, on the Westside in “Mexican Chicago,” another area where Jesenia does sex work. I arrived before her, which is typical—for as the saying goes, “there’s ‘people of color time’, and then there’s ‘trans Latina time’”). I waited for half an hour, but wasn’t concerned. Then 45 minutes. Then an hour had passed, and I started to worry. I called her cell and she didn’t answer. I went inside the library and looked around, thinking we somehow passed each other. Something told me (perhaps my 14 months of research with sex workers) to check behind the library.

As I walked around the side of the building, I saw a small figure farther down the street, upper-body falling over to one-side, left arm outstretched, head hanging down, chest slowly inhaling and exhaling. It was Jesenia, she was asleep, standing on the sidewalk, as people passed her by. My heart stopped for a second. I got closer, called out her name, and she awoke. A huge smile grew on her face, and she said, “*Mamita*, so happy to see you!” We embraced. I asked her if she was ok, and she seemed unaware that she was just asleep. I insisted on taking her to lunch, hoping that a good meal would sober her up.

We got tacos, and throughout our conversation, she drifted in and out. I fought back tears, in a state of disbelief that Jesenia, one of my most reliable interlocutors, was likely back on drugs, after over ten years of being sober. I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised, as my very own research demonstrates that life as a trans Latina sex worker is perilous, debilitating, and short.

There were so many questions I had planned on asking her, but instead managed to only get out, more so as an expression of exasperation, “This Trump administration.” She replied, “Oh

mamita, that’s just business as usual.” She was asleep again before I could ask her to elaborate. We eventually finished lunch and I made sure she got home safely. Once I was alone, I broke into tears. Jesenia, my rock, had fallen back into drug use to medicate the difficulties she faced. Since this difficult day, I have been in conversation with other members the trans Latina community who know Jesenia well about the best ways to support her. Jesenia, herself, has supported so many of them, and in many ways she has also supported me and this project.

Throughout this manuscript, I challenge the tendency in the literature to focus on transgender white subjects, and place trans Latina women at the nexus of critical debates about geography, race, gender, sexuality, and class. I also suggest that we take the words, voices, and epistemologies of sex working trans Latina women seriously. While concluding, I ethnographically and theoretically situate trans women of color at the center of the economy, knowledge production, and the everyday--three arenas they are actively excluded from.

Business as usual. What does Jesenia mean by “business?” What is “usual”? What can sex working trans Latinas tell us about both in the current social and political moment in the U.S.? I argue that their experiences reveal that while some things are novel, many are not, resulting in a profound ambivalence, which also characterizes their lives more broadly. This ambivalence, however, does not result in stagnancy and instead can be a space of potentiality. I then turn to their activist efforts, which arise from an ambiguous space of potentiality, and contend that we should also focalize them, as trans Latinas have persisted and resisted despite decades, even centuries, of grave violence and insecurity.

Anti-Latinx sentiments and policies are increasing at alarming rates under the current political administration. For example, within the first 100 days in office, Trump signed executive orders to increase the policing and detention of undocumented immigrants, and to expedite the

deportation of currently detained immigrants. Attorney General Sessions has encouraged the criminalization of immigrants and ICE agents now acts with impunity. Executive orders have directed the Department of Homeland Security to move forward in constructing the southern border. The hiring of Border Patrol agents has been expanded, as well as the construction of new detention centers. Moreover, the Justice Department has rescinded guidance to end the use of private detention centers. And Trump has publicly stated that the majority of Mexican immigrants are “criminals, drug-dealers, and rapists.”¹⁷

Attacks against the transgender community have also escalated. Vice President Pence is proudly homophobic, and has been known to support “conversion therapy”—which is incredibly hateful, dehumanizing, and traumatic for gay and trans people. When governor of Indiana, Pence de-funded HIV/AIDS prevention, resulting in an outbreak of the virus—the worst in the state’s history. Secretary of Education DeVos revoked federal protections for transgender students, which simply allowed them to use the bathroom. All mention of the LGBTQ community was removed from the white house and state department websites. Attempts were recently made to bar transgender people from joining the military, and Attorney General Sessions has explicitly stated that workplace discrimination protections do not apply to transgender people.¹⁸

Surely, then, life must be markedly worse for transgender Latinas under Trump. An ethnographic perspective, however, reveals a number of messy contradictions that beg for more careful analysis. Before the assent of 45, the women with whom I work were recurrently policed when in various public spaces, including bathrooms, because of their gender and race. And the majority were pushed out of school because of harassment by peers, and even teachers. They

¹⁷ For an overview on the anti-Latinx policies under the Trump and Pence administration see: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/02/23/latinos-and-the-new-trump-administration/>

¹⁸ <https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration>

were likely not the LGBTQ individuals being referred to on the white house website. In fact, they repeatedly lamented that they were triply excluded from the dominant LGBTQ movement because of their race, (trans)gender, and occupation. The U.S. military has long been a tool of racial and sexual terror against people of color, and Latin Americans especially, with particularly violent interventions in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba—all places my interlocutors are from or are have familial connections. Moreover, trans Latinas were never protected by anti-discrimination laws. They reported countless examples of employment discrimination, at various points of the job seeking process and when actively working in the formal sector, because of their gender, and race--especially those who were black and/or primarily Spanish-speaking. Lastly, my undocumented trans folks have lived in fear of deportation since long before 45. Sex working, I found, increases one's chance of encountering the deportation machine, and vice-versa, being deported increases one's likelihood of engaging in sexual labor.

Jesenia's reflection, then, that the activities of the new presidential administration are just "business as usual" reflects the claim recently made by Jonathan Rosa and Yarimar Bonilla (2017) that the contemporary era is not exceptional. This country was not intended for people of color and certainly not for trans women of color, and in fact was built to work against them. To be sure, I do not mean to underestimate the gravity of the current political period in creating laws and an environment that is visibly hostile to trans people and Latinx people. In fact, on the night of the election, Trans Lifeline (a crisis hotline for transgender folks) received twice as many calls than it does in one typical day. And at least eight people committed suicide, most of them teenagers. The undocumented women, for example, have expressed that they are more scared than before, but that living in fear is not new. They are used to regularly encountering violence from clients, police officers, immigration officers, prison guards, romantic partners, employers,

potential employers, other members of the LGBTQ community, other sex workers, and random people just passing them by in public. Therefore, theorizing from the experiences of my transgender Latinas reveals that the present moment is one of deep ambivalence.

Ambivalence, however, does not equate to complacency. Instead, ambivalence can be a space of potentiality. And “business as usual” can also refer to the ways in which trans Latinas have been and are persisting and resisting, despite their multiple marginalizations. My interlocutors have been involved in activist efforts for years, and trans women of color have been at the forefront (whether they are recognized for it or not) of many pivotal moments in LGBTQ history. For example, Sylvia Rivera, a homeless Venezuelan and Puerto Rican transgender woman living in New York City was pivotal in the Stonewall Riots, which is considered the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement. Homeless and sex working by the age of 12, she vocally critiqued the dominant LGBTQ movement for being exclusive of people of color, the poor, and the homeless. At a gay rights rally in Washington Square Park she in 1973, she took the stage as the participants booed her. She screamed out at the crowd:

Y'all better quiet down. I've been trying to get up here all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail that write me every motherfucking week and ask for your help and you all don't do a goddamn thing for them...The people are trying to do something for all of us, and not men and women that belong to a white middle class white club. And that's what you all belong to!

By the end of her speech she is leading the crowd in a chant of “Gay power!”

Rivera and foundational black transgender activist Marcia P. Johnson founded the activist group STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) and opened a homeless shelter. For the last eight years, the Trans Latina Coalition has spearheaded and participated in actions that seek to both reform the political enterprise from within (like fighting for legal protection) and more

radically challenge the system as a whole, (like stopping traffic covered in red paint to draw attention to the exorbitantly high rates of murder of trans women of color).

To be clear, however, many women have expressed that the Trump administration has encouraged them to fight harder. A few months after our library meeting, I spoke with Jesenia on the phone. She was lucid and said, “We must make our presence known, people must know that we exist. Our existence is resistance.” Yet, the politics of visibility are also fraught amongst queer people of color. At other times, Jesenia, and others, have suspected that more visibility does not necessarily mean less violence, and in fact may mean the opposite. Regardless, while acknowledging the risks of visibility, and the ways current moment is not completely novel, they can also be galvanized by it. Brenda, who is 46, Mexican, and was undocumented for twelve years before being granted asylum (which is very rare) said the following a few weeks ago when reflecting on the presidential administration:

He’s the enemy. Consequently, he’s been creating hate. He’s given people the tools and the right to hate the trans Latina community. And we already had so many communities against us.

On the other hand, what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. I think we are in a trans revolution all over the country, trans women of color are standing up. We are fighting against Trump. I see it all over. The community is creating and building spaces, even underground. We are standing up for justice.

Brenda recognizes that while the Trump administration may be encouraging more violence against trans Latinas, trans Latina communities around the country are organizing and acting in resistance.

Brenda then excitedly reminded me of the “1st Trans-Gay Migrant Caravan,” or “Rainbow 17,” which consisted of eleven trans women and six gay men from different Central American countries who crossed the border and surrendered themselves to border officials, after holding up a colorful sign that read “Primera Caravan Trans-Gay 2017.” Before crossing at Nogales, Arizona, they all met each other after being denied asylum in Mexico. They bonded

over similar experiences of gendered violence in Central America. They then brainstormed, and reached out to numerous legal organizations specializing in asylum in the US. Attorneys and other volunteers flew to Mexico, and provided legal advice, and some even crossed with them. Protestors showed support on both sides of the border. After they turned themselves in, the Rainbow 17 were detained in Milan, New Mexico.

Brenda, who crossed twelve years ago, was deported three times, and detained for many months, could relate to the members of the caravan, especially the trans women. She felt so compelled to help them. She said she knew that they were getting legal counsel, but she “knew from experience.” She had lived it, she asserted. Brenda is one of the most tenacious people I have ever met, and she contacted one of the legal organizations travelling to New Mexico and asked if she could come along. They said yes. They flew her to New Mexico and she met many of the trans women. She proudly recounted to me that she “coached” them on what to say to asylum officers. When Brenda asked them why they sought asylum many said because of gang violence. She told them, “No! Don’t even mention gangs! You must always emphasize the discrimination and violence you experience because of your gender! Always focus on your gender!” I was reminded of something Jesenia said to me when I began conducting research in 2015, “Activism isn’t just being loud on the streets, but also the small quiet moments of caring for a sister.” Jesenia’s insistence on helping the Rainbow 17 seemed to fall somewhere between the two modalities of activism. The sharing of knowledge, and involvement in various types of activism and care amongst trans Latina women can also be considered “business as usual.”

After two months in detention, the labors of activists and lawyers were fruitful: fourteen members of the caravan (including all the transgender women) were granted parole. They will no longer have to endure the horrific violences of being in a man’s detention center while pursuing

their asylum cases. While this is a victory in itself, the battle is far from over. Historically less than one-third of cases are granted asylum, and 45 wants the Department of Homeland Security to approve even less. Asylum seekers must wait months or years for permission to work, and for access to housing or food support. This is precisely why undocumented trans Latinas turn to sex work in the first place. Notably, sex work, a crime of “moral turpitude,” can make someone ineligible for asylum, per legal requirements.

Brenda and I sat in silence with this harsh reality for a few moments. I eventually mustered up enough courage to ask her how Jesenia was doing. She too, suspects Jesenia is using heroin. I find myself haunted by the image of her on the sidewalk—slouched over, asleep while standing, with an outstretched arm. And I am simultaneously heartened that Brenda, a poor sex worker in Chicago, found a way to support her sisters over a thousand miles away. In addition to this one act, Brenda is involved in several other activist activities, and has been finding as many fora as possible to share her story and her “knowledge from experience.” Therefore, it is within this tension, “this ambiguous space of potentiality,” that my interlocutors, like many other Latinxs and transgender folks before them, develop and share unique knowledges and exercise various forms of activism, from “being loud on the streets” to “caring for a sister” in “those small quiet moments.” Against the backdrop of extreme violence and political, economic, racial, and social marginalization, this too is “business as usual” in America.

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